

# **The leadership habitus of principals in elite contexts: an exploration of practice in four schools**

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## **Abstract**

This study seeks to explore the relationship between the leadership habitus of eight school principals and the specific contexts in which they lead, how these principals forged their pathways to high status positions widely regarded as being successful and how their current practices compare and differ across contexts.

Four elite schools which are different in their ethos and population of students were chosen for this study. The principals and deputy principals in each of these schools were interviewed about their past histories and current practices.

The study is conceptually framed by Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital, field and strategies. It examines the childhood, educational and professional experiences and current practices of the principals in order to gain insight towards answering the following questions:

- What constitutes leadership practice in four high-achieving, high-prestige schools?
- How do leadership practices compare and differ across these different elite school contexts?

The main findings of the study show that there is a strong alignment between the individual habitus of the principals and the institutional habitus of the schools they lead. Their past experiences enable them to draw on various forms of capital to inform their current practices. There are many similarities between the principals, especially with regards to their habitus and initial capital, but there are also differences, particularly in the way their leadership practices are adapted to their particular school contexts.

## Table of Contents

<u>Chapter 1: Introduction.....</u>	<u>1</u>
Purpose of the Study.....	1
Rationale.....	1
Research Questions.....	3
Overview of the Study.....	3
<u>Chapter 2: Literature Review .....</u>	<u>5</u>
<u>Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework .....</u>	<u>11</u>
Habitus.....	12
Capital.....	13
Field .....	13
Strategies.....	13
<u>Chapter 4: Research Design.....</u>	<u>15</u>
School and Principal Selection.....	15
Data Production.....	19
Developing the Interview Schedule.....	20
Reliability, Validity and Generalizability .....	29
Ethical Considerations .....	31
Data Analysis .....	33
<u>Chapter 5: Presentation of the Findings of the Study.....</u>	<u>35</u>
Introduction to the Eight Principals.....	35
Similarities and Differences.....	40
Personal Background.....	40
Education Background.....	43
Professional Experience .....	46
Professional Practices.....	53
<u>Chapter 6: Conclusions of the Study .....</u>	<u>59</u>
WHO .....	59
HOW .....	61
<u>References.....</u>	<u>65</u>
<u>Appendix.....</u>	<u>71</u>

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to describe and compare leadership practices in four elite schools, in order to investigate the relationship between the practices of school leaders, their histories and the contexts in which they lead.

### Rationale

My personal goals for conducting this study have evolved out of my own leadership position in an elite school, and a desire to make a contribution to the existing body of knowledge in leadership studies. I am curious about the relationship between leadership practices and elite school contexts, the nature of these practices in schools that are generally assumed to be 'successful', how these practices differ across contexts and how these practices align with what the literature describes as the features of successful school leadership.

There is a tendency in South Africa to focus on disadvantaged schools. In order to improve schools in challenging circumstances, there is an implicit assumption that they need to emulate advantaged schools in the way they are led, that leaders in advantaged schools lead well and that what will work in one school will work in another. While this study does not examine leadership practices in schools in challenging circumstances, it implicitly questions these assumptions.

There is some consensus in the literature that the responsibilities of the school principal have become greater and more complex due to a range of factors including but not limited to decentralization (Brundrett & Dering, 2006, Bush & Glover, 2009, Hopkins et al, 1997, McInerney, 2003, van Niekerk & van Niekerk, 2006), marketisation (Chapman & Harris, 2004, Fiske & Ladd, 2000), globalisation (Tarabini, 2010), rapid technological advancements and increased accountability (Bush & Glover, 2009,

Ravitch, 2010), all resulting in increasingly rapid change (Franey, 2002). It is clear that it is at minimum challenging to be a successful principal.

I'm interested in how leaders in elite schools respond to this increasingly demanding and increasingly global context. Much of the research on school leaders focuses on the practices, personal characteristics and styles of leaders, but less is written on how individuals came to be in particular schools in the first place, or about leadership in the elite school context. Some of the factors relevant to how leaders end up in particular schools relate to principal training and approaches to succession. There are numerous avenues to school leadership, with different countries requiring varying forms of accreditation.

Different countries also experience different leadership issues. England has experienced lower rates of succession (Bush, 2011:786) while the Netherlands, Sweden, France and Germany have experienced leadership shortages (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009a:368), which is concerning in terms of sourcing the best possible candidates to lead schools. In South Africa, the concerns around school leadership are related primarily to quality (Bush, 2011:798), which is cause for alarm in a country that so desperately needs quality in order to allow more equality. Research suggests that leadership has a strong role to play in improved student performance (Chikoko et al, 2011, Harris, 2002:24, Harris, 2004:3, Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009a:364, Supovitz et al, 2010). A better understanding of the factors that shape leadership practices in particular contexts will contribute to the development of improved leadership practices.

According to Yin (1994), a good researcher researches the literature not for answers, but to elicit further questions. There have been various recent studies on elite schooling (Howard & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2010, Khan, 2011, Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2009), but fewer studies on elite school leadership practices across different contexts.

This study examines the personal and career trajectories as well as differing contextual factors that influence the leadership of eight principals in four different elite schools.

## Research Questions

This is a small qualitative study that examines the childhood, educational and professional experiences and current practices of eight school principals in four elite schools in order to gain insight towards answering the following questions:

- What constitutes leadership practice in four high-achieving, high-prestige schools?
- How does this leadership compare and differ across these different elite school contexts?

Sub-questions:

Who are the leaders at these schools?

- How do these principals compare and differ in terms of their habitus and symbolic, social and cultural capital?

How do these principals lead?

- How do these principals compare and differ in terms of their interplay with the field and the strategies that constitute their practice?

## Overview of the Study

This study explores the relationship between school leaders, their histories and current practices, and the contexts in which they lead. Eight principals were interviewed in order to produce the data for this study.

The notion of 'leader' can be defined in many ways, but for the purposes of this study, leaders have been identified in relation to their positions. Among others, the titles used at different schools vary



from 'principal' to 'headmaster/mistress' to 'director'. Regardless of these titles, the leaders in this study will be referred to as principals and deputy principals.

This chapter introduces the study and research questions, and offers a rationale. In Chapter 2, literature relating to successful principals and their practices is reviewed in order to generate a conceptual framework that enables me to focus on particular features of 'leadership'. Drawing on the theories of Bourdieu, Chapter 3 outlines the conceptual framework. This framework identifies the concepts of habitus, capital, field and strategies as "thinking tools" (Jenkins, 1992:67), which guide data production and analysis of the histories, practices and dispositions of school leaders. Chapter 4 describes the research design, while Chapter 5 discusses the findings of the study. The conclusions of the study are presented and discussed in Chapter 6.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The intention of most school reforms is targeted towards the improvement of student performance outcomes and school leadership has been a focus of many of these reforms. Bush (2011:789) states that: “Effective leadership is increasingly regarded as a vital component of successful organizations.” The literature suggests that school leadership is an ever-changing, increasingly demanding role (Franey, 2002, Harris, 2004:3, Tutt & Williams, 2012:8) which, when effective, has a strong influence on increased school improvement (Chikoko et al, 2011, Harris, 2002:24, Harris, 2004:3, Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009a:364, Supovitz et al, 2010). The literature on school leadership covers a wide variety of research including a large body of literature on various forms of leadership (such as transformational, strategic, instructional and charismatic) (Bush & Glover, 2009, Mentz et al, 2010, Ross & Gray, 2006, Stoll et al, 2006, van Niekerk & van Niekerk, 2006), and leadership training and development (Brundrett & Dering, 2006, Bush, 2011, Bush, 2012, Chikoko et al, 2011, Mentz et al, 2010, Nicolaidou & Petridou, 2011, Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009a, Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009b). There is, therefore, a body of literature that helps us understand the ways in which school principals lead and how they have been enabled to lead.

In defining the terms in which to describe the leadership practices of elite school principals, it is first necessary to decide which features of leadership to focus on. This section reviews literature on the practices and dispositions of successful principals in order to define different domains of leadership practice. While I’m not interested in evaluating these principals with regard to their success, I do need to identify domains of leadership in relation to which to describe their current practices. The literature reviewed in this study enabled me to create a list of descriptors for leadership and use these to compare the practices of principals across four different elite school contexts.

### Success, Leadership and Context

Although defining success and its variant forms is a complex task, “...improvement must ultimately be assessed in terms of improved pupil achievement outcomes;” (Potter et al, 2002:251). Ylimaki et al

(2007:362) concur with this view that improved results are able to provide a measure of success. There is an acceptance of the view, however, that what can be defined as successful or effective is more context-specific than a universally described phenomenon (Ngcobo & Tikly, 2010:223, Potter et al, 2002:243). Ngcobo & Tikly (2010:223) argue more specifically that what makes a leader successful in South Africa varies according to context. They contend that context is more important than leadership training and suggest that the definition of a successful leader should be broadened to take context into account.

There is some consensus that the principal does have an important effect on student achievement, although these effects are usually mediated rather than direct (Chikoko et al, 2011: 317, Hallinger & Heck, 1998, Hoadley et al, 2009, Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009a, Supovitz et al, 2010, Tornsen, 2010 (Harris, 2004:3). The view that principals have a strong impact on learning is reflected in the fact that the principal is often changed in failing schools as the first step towards improvement (Potter et al, 2002:248).

The schools in this study have consistently achieved top exit exam results. Whether this achievement is linked to common leadership practices across the schools or context specific practices forms part of this research.

### What (Successful) Principals Do

There are common themes which frequently appear in the literature on school leadership, and from which domains of leadership practice can be identified. These facets of successful leadership can be divided into strategies and practices, and leadership dispositions; what leaders do and who leaders are. This section outlines what successful principals do according to the literature.

A strong commitment to the school's vision, mission and goals is a clear feature of the practice of successful principals (Franey, 2002, Hallinger & Heck, 1999, Harris, 2002, Hoadley et al, 2009, Gray & Streshky, 2008, Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, Ngcobo & Tikly, 2010, Potter et al, 2002, van Niekerk & van Niekerk, 2006, Ylimaki et al, 2007). 'Successful' principals clarify and communicate these

unambiguously to the school community and adhere to them consistently. Adhering to a vision enables the principal and team to collectively work towards a goal and be proactive rather than reactive, getting caught up with the daily commotion of school life. This common vision provides a framework for daily practice and clarifies to all school community members a “shared image of an ideal future” (Kowalski, 2010:36).

The promotion of shared leadership (also known as distributed or dispersed leadership) and the view that it positively contributes to improvement is prevalent in more recent literature (Chapman & Harris, 2004, Franey, 2002, Harris, 2009, Ngcobo & Tikly, 2003, Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009b). This view is highlighted in the following two quotes:

*“...there has been a change over an extended period of time from a concentration on leadership as individual action to leadership as a collective activity.” (Dempster, 2009:22)*

*“...reference was made to the importance of shared leadership. This has been clearly shown to be a significant change in educational leadership literature, putting into deep shadow the primacy of individualistic, iconic or heroic forms of leadership.” (Waterhouse & Moller, 2009:121)*

According to Hayes et al (2006:26), leadership must also be dispersed “so that learning becomes the responsibility of as many people as possible.” If the purpose of schools is to improve learning for all, then, according to this literature, it makes sense to share the leadership to enable this purpose as the impact of shared leadership is much higher than the possible impact of one individual (Dempster, 2009:28). Shared leadership comes in many forms and will look different across various school contexts, but it seems necessary to establish some form of this leadership action to forge the pathway for success.

An improvement in student performance is linked to the successful principal’s focus on instruction (Darling-Hammond et al, 2008, Frost, 2009, Fullan, 2006, Gray & Streshky, 2008, Harris, 2002, Hoadley

et al, 2009, Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, Mentz et al, 2010, Ngcobo & Tikly, 2010, Potter et al, 2002, Ylimaki et al, 2007), which is also referred to as 'instructional leadership' (Bush & Glover, 2009). Instructional leadership manifests itself in a diverse range of school activities. To highlight a few examples, the principal will need to be up to date with each teacher's current classroom practices, ensure the monitoring of curriculum, plan for targeted professional development and foster conversations around teaching and learning.

Developing a community of professional learning (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009, DuFour, 2004, Frost, 2009, Harris & Jones, 2010, Hayes et al, 2006, Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, Parr & Timperley, 2010, Stoll et al, 2006, Supovitz et al 2010) emerges in the literature as a strong determinant in the success of a leader. Professional learning communities (PLCs) take on many forms, but essentially they are about teachers working together collaboratively to examine and interpret data in order to find ways to best meet the needs of their students and improve their learning. PLCs strengthen the capacity of teachers to improve the teaching and learning within their schools. This is also an important aspect of instructional leadership as collaborative teams meet to examine results and determine ways to best suit the needs of the children and improve achievement. The literature on PLCs is extensive as the positive effect these can have on school reform efforts has been the focus of many practitioners in the field. The extent to which school principals promote, develop and foster a climate of collaboration within their schools, therefore contributes to the strength of the professional learning community and the impact this has on teaching and learning.

Training and developing staff, both in skills and psychologically (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, van Niekerk & van Niekerk, 2006), has also been shown to be a priority of successful leaders. Leadership training and development varies worldwide with different countries requiring different levels of education and certification to take on school leadership roles. There has been a shift in thinking away from an earlier view, born out of 'great man' theories, that an effective teacher would make an effective leader. The more currently accepted view, however, is that leadership now requires its own training which "requires long-term investments of time, energy, and attention by multiple parties" (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2006:291), rather than leaders just moving up the ranks and randomly acquiring the skills

along the way. As Bush (2012:666) explains, “Being qualified only for the very different job of classroom teacher is no longer appropriate. If this model was followed for other careers, surgeons would be trained as nurses and pilots as flight attendants. While competence as a teacher is necessary for school leaders, it is certainly not sufficient.” The view that effective educational leaders make a significant difference and that they therefore need some form of formal training is evident in the research (Bush, 2012, Mentz et al, 2010), but “there is less agreement about what preparation is required to develop appropriate leadership behaviours.” (Bush et al, 2011:31). Although what specific training is unclear in the literature, Clarke & Wildy (2010) highlight the necessity of experience over time and in context as crucial to leadership development. More significantly in this context, what preparation is key to leading an elite school? Do various forms of capital contribute to the potential of an elite school principal?

Principals are achieving success in various contexts with varying levels of training and resources. This lends itself to the argument that success is context-specific and therefore skills and knowledge need to be learned on the job. But this does not also mean that prior training is not important: the two are not mutually exclusive. According to Bush (2012:664), “Leadership development is a much broader concept and may be understood as the whole process involved in educating leaders.” Mentz et al (2010:160) echo this in their research: “Leadership preparation can be both formal and informal.”

The ability to build relationships and the strength of communication has also been identified as a factor contributing to success (Bush & Glover, 2009, Gray & Streshky, 2008, Harris, 2002, Kowalski, 2010, van Niekerk & van Niekerk, 2006). Strengthening the relationships of all members in the school’s community requires strong interpersonal skills, dedication and particular characteristics.

### Leadership Dispositions: Who Principals Are

The personal histories of principals, and specifically their experiences of other schools, imprint their own unique stamp on each individual and therefore contribute to the principal’s sense of self and impact on how they operate within their current schools. As explained by Lingard et al (2003:9), “Experiences of school are sedimented in the personal biographies of individuals...”. The childhood and

schooling experiences of individual principals will have contributed to the layers that form their character, contributing to the construction of their identities and their dispositions as leaders.

Trait theories of leadership no longer dominate explanations of success, but the literature does identify personal characteristics of successful school leaders. The values a principal holds, establishes and communicates to staff influence their success as a leader (Harris, 2002:18, Ngcobo & Tikly, 2010:203 van Niekerk & van Niekerk, 2006). The behaviour of leaders which enhance the interpersonal communication and relationship building capacity are, according to Marzano (2003) and Gray & Streshky (2008): optimism, honesty and consideration.

On the basis of this literature review, the principals influence on the following are relevant to a description of leadership practice:

- The degree of coherence with regards to a collective understanding of purpose
- The degree to which various members of staff take on responsibilities in the school
- The amount of focus placed on instruction
- The degree to which teachers work collectively
- What forms of formal and informal training have been followed by staff members and are available to staff
- The degree to which the principals focus on relationships within the school
- The degree to which the school community feels informed about the operation and activities of the school
- The degree to which the values of the school leaders align with the ethos of the school

## Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework

The literature review identified particular leadership practices that are considered to be central to the success of schools. This chapter aims to develop a conceptual framework that relates these practices, on the one hand, to the school context and past experience of principals, and on the other, in order to develop an analytical framework. This analytical framework guides the design of interviews and the data analysis.

To conceptualize the research, the domains of principal practice outlined in the literature review will be examined through the lens of Bourdieu's "thinking tools" (Jenkins, 1992:67), specifically with regards to habitus, capital, field and strategies. As a result of the importance Bourdieu places on past experiences and how they shape current practices, using his concepts in conducting this study necessitates in-depth interviews in order to examine the life histories of the research participants. The notion of habitus is often written about and analysed in literature in the field of education studies (Eacott, 2010, Jenkins, 1992, Lingard & Christie, 2003, Mahar et al, 1990, Reed-Danahay, 1984), but Lingard & Christie (2003:318) point out that there is relatively little research in the field of educational leadership that apply the concepts of Bourdieu. There is however, more recent research on educational leadership which does draw on Bourdieu's theories (Gunter, 2005, Kenway & Koh, 2013, Koh & Kenway, 2012). This study will contribute to the current body of research on leadership, using Bourdieu's theories to conceptualise leadership practice in four different elite school contexts. Habitus, capital, field and strategies will all be used to conceptualize leadership practice and how it varies across contexts.

These will allow an exploration into the following:

- What each principal brings from the past that influences their current practices (habitus)
- The economic, symbolic, social and cultural capitals that each principal possesses that are valued in their particular field and context (capital)
- How each principal engages with the field of education (field)
- What strategies the principals adopt to influence their career trajectory and school practices (strategies)



## Habitus

Habitus encompasses all the past experiences that shape a leader's disposition and ways of doing things. It is described as the internalised set of dispositions as experienced and determined through the events of a certain life trajectory and set of circumstances which shape how an actor engages with their current contextual conditions (Bourdieu, 1990, Jenkins, 1992, Lingard & Christie, 2003, Mahar et al, 1990, Reed-Danahay, 1984). Lingard & Christie (2003:320) more specifically describe habitus as "... the acquired, socially-constituted dispositions of social agents, to the classificatory principles they use, and the organizing principles of the actions that they undertake without conscious planning." It is the unconscious internalizing of surroundings and events that is crucial to habitus. Jenkins (1992:75) emphasises this unconscious dimension of the acquisition of habitus: "The power of the habitus derives from the thoughtlessness of habit and habituation, rather than consciously learned rules and principles."

As Koh & Kenway (2012) remind us, Bourdieu was particularly interested in habitus formation associated with social class. Elite schools mostly cater to families with a high socioeconomic status. This raises questions about the socio-economic status of principals, relative to those of the students at a school. Does, in Bourdieu's words, "capital find its way to capital" (Bourdieu, 1998:21)?

Atkinson (2011) extends the concept of habitus to describe institutional and family habitus as he explains that individual habitus alone cannot "capture the messy complexities and myriad nuances of concrete social life." (Atkinson, 2011:332). Institutional habitus describes the collective nature of a school "with its unique configuration of principles, practices and processes," (Atkinson, 2011:333) and how this impacts upon the individual. Family habitus refers to the "the deeply ingrained system of perspectives, experiences and predispositions family members share" (Reay, 1998:527). The interplay of the personal, family and school experiences will all therefore have an effect on a principal.

## Capital

Capital refers to what is valued in a particular context. As the principals entered the field of education, certain capitals, which are derived from the past, became enablers and when these capitals are matched to what is valued in the institution, the pathway to the top becomes ever more attainable. Researchers recognise different forms of capital but there are essentially four categories of capital: economic, symbolic, cultural and social (Jenkins, 1992:85). This study has focused mainly on cultural capital (how the principals know what to do), but economic capital (access to financial resources), symbolic capital (status held from previous positions or associations) and social capital (who you know) are all featured in some way in the principals career paths.

## Field

Habitus does not provide the only determinant of a life trajectory. Bourdieu's notion of habitus has been criticized for being too deterministic (Jenkins, 1992:82), but the ability to subconsciously manage the effects of one's habitus through strategies (Eacott, 2010) within a particular context or 'field' (Lingard & Christie, 2003:322) illuminates this idea of "individual agency and structural determinism." (Eacott, 2010:267).

Jenkins (1992:85) refers to the field as "a structured system of social positions – occupied either by individuals or institutions – the nature of which defines the situation for their occupants." In this case, 'field' refers to the complexities of education institutions and practices, and more specifically those pertaining to schools. The field is dynamic with fluid boundaries and includes social and economic conditions and any resulting power struggles (Mahar et al, 1990:8). In the case of this study, the focus is on the position and activities of principals and the ways in which they engage with the field of education.

## Strategies

If habitus is too deterministic, then it is the strategies that release somewhat the constraints of habitus. Eacott (2010) uses strategies in his research to place emphasis on the individual agency aspect

of this sociological puzzle. He states that, “For Bourdieu, strategy is not conscious, individual rational choice, rather appropriate actions taken without conscious reflection.” (Eacott, 2010:268). But he clarifies that the ability to devise and enact strategies is still a product of the internalized habitus: “Strategy or the feel for the game entails moves in the game that are based on mastery of its logic, acquired through experience, part of *habitus*.” (Eacott, 2010:268).

In this study, I have investigated the interaction of habitus, capital, strategies and field to understand the nature of each principal’s leadership in their unique context. Bourdieu’s ‘thinking tools’ enabled me to investigate how histories inform leaders and shape their choices. How has the principal’s habitus led them consciously or unconsciously to a leadership role, and more specifically to the dimensions of leadership practices identified in the previous chapter? I have drawn on Bourdieu’s notions of habitus, capital, strategies and field when analyzing the mixture of past experiences, training, informal preparation and current practices to examine the similarities and differences of each school leader in their particular context.

## Chapter 4: Research Design

This study seeks to explore the relationship between the leadership habitus of the principals and the specific contexts in which they lead, as well as how this varies across each context. In order to explore this, four schools which are different in their ethos and population of students, but which all fall within the broader context of elite schooling were chosen for this study. The principals and deputy principals in each of these schools were interviewed at length about their past history and their current practices. Each individual history constitutes a case study. The aim was to identify commonalities and differences between the leaders. For the purposes of anonymity, each school and each principal has been given a pseudonym.

The following schools were chosen:

- School A - St. Stephen's College: An independent all-boys school
- School B - St. Margaret's School for Girls: An independent all-girls school
- School C - Upton College: A highly selective co-educational government school
- School D - Hilldale College: An international co-educational school

### School and Principal Selection

#### School Selection

As Liethwood & Riehl (2005) point out, there is no one size fits all model of leadership across contexts. I selected four elite schools in order to gain a multifaceted and comparative understanding of leadership in these contexts.

In order to select elite schools for this study, I made use of the following definition provided by Koh & Kenway (2012:333):

*"...elite schools can be defined by having "just about the best of everything, from state-of-the-art facilities to specialised and differentiated curriculum" as well as success in national exams as well as varied offerings and accomplishments beyond academics such as art and sport."*

I therefore chose schools that conformed to these criteria. All four schools in the study have excellent facilities, a wide range of available academic, sporting and cultural activities and accomplishments, good exam results and high fees. St. Stephen's, St. Margaret's and Upton College all ranked in the top ten for exam results in the province in 2012. Hilldale College follows a different curriculum and all its candidates passed their exit exams in 2012. The independent school fees (St. Stephen's, St. Margaret's and Hilldale) range from approximately R75,000 to R97,000 per annum in the high school years. Upton's fees are approximately R27,000 per annum.

Independent schools in South Africa generally have high fees and as a result, apart from the few on special bursaries, only members of the economic elite can attend. These schools have entrance assessments and are able to select their students. As a result of this selection process, the opportunity to gain placement in these schools is highly competitive. Learners enjoy the luxury of a wide range of co-curricular activities and students are given the opportunity to excel in a number of areas. Even though all four schools are elite, they vary in curriculum, population of students (by gender and nationality) and values across the four schools, as described below.

#### St. Stephen's College (School A): An Independent All-Boys School

St. Stephen's College is a private school for boys from 5 to 18 years old. It is a traditional, very established South African school with a long history and religious affiliations. It prides itself on academic, sporting and cultural success. Boys attending this school have access to a wide range of state-of-the-art facilities and varied ways to find personal success through the many offerings at the school and are encouraged to find their own personal niche. According to the principal, the school works to develop the whole man by providing a well-rounded education with academics, sport religious and cultural activities all having a high priority. The deputy principal at this school explains that boys thrive on competition and this atmosphere is encouraged and developed at the school. Embracing diversity is a high priority for the school and giving back to the community via various outreach programmes is a fundamental part of the ethos of the school. Entrance into the school is competitive and fees are high. The school achieved a place in the top ten in the province in the National Senior Certificate examinations in 2012 and the principal is extremely proud of their results. The principal from this school will be referred to as Mr. Knight (A1) and the deputy principal as Mr.

Robertson (A2). 'A' refers to School A (St. Stephen's College), '1' refers to principal while '2' refers to deputy principal. This numbering system applies to all eight principals and shows both the school and position of each principal.

#### St. Margaret's School for Girls (School B): An Independent All-Girls School

St. Margaret's School for Girls is a private school for girls from 3 to 18 years old. It is a traditional, well-established South African school with a long history and religious affiliations. Top ten in the province exam results were produced in 2012 and excellence is integral to the vision statement of the school. Students have access to a wide range of state-of-the-art facilities and sporting, academic, cultural and spiritual extra-curricular activities are on offer. Entrance assessments allow the school to choose their entrants from a pool of candidates that are able to afford their fees. The principal from this school will be referred to as Mr. Hill (B1) and the deputy principal as Mrs. Palmer (B2).

#### Upton College (School C): A Highly Selective Co-Educational Government School

Like private schools in the area, this government school is selective due to high demand. It is a high school serving boys and girls in Grades 8 to 12. The learners at this school also have access to a wide range of academic, sport, fine and performing arts activities. The students enjoy good facilities, have a diverse range of activities from which to choose and the school is able to boast about results in the top ten in the province in 2012. Children attending this school are educated in a co-educational environment with high diversity in terms of race, religion, creed and socioeconomic background. Through the school's vision statement, very high expectations are set for the students and this infiltrates their daily school life. Entrance to the school is competitive and hopeful candidates sit entrance exams and take part in interviews with the principal. The principal from this school will be referred to as Mr. Lewis (C1) and the deputy principal as Mrs. Morris (C2).

#### Hilldale College (School D): An International Co-Educational School

International schools are schools that do not provide the host country's curriculum and have a large population of international students and staff. They were originally created in order to educate the children of expatriates who travelled for work and therefore filled a need for a globally transient population (Hayden & Thompson, 2008). As global mobility has increased, so has the number of

international schools. These schools have high fees and are therefore available to the economically advantaged. Hilldale College fits this description. It is a small co-educational school serving children from 2 to 18 years of age. The school employs an international curriculum and is accredited by an international association. Students attending this school are offered an international curriculum that more easily allows them access to tertiary education institutions overseas. Expatriate parents also choose this school for the curriculum. The school, through its curriculum, sets out to provide academic rigor and prepare its students for university level standards.

The principal from this school will be referred to as Mr. Johnson (D1) and the deputy principal as Mr. Parker (D2).

### Principal Selection

Within the four chosen schools, eight principals were interviewed for this study. At each school, the person in the top leadership position as well as one of their deputies was interviewed. Overall, six men and two women were interviewed. Both women were in deputy positions. Each school has its own unique history and ethos and serves a different population of students. Choosing the schools in this way served to highlight whether there are any links between the principals and the ethos of their schools, as well as providing a comparative analysis of their leadership within their specific contexts.

Hayden (2006) sheds light on the fact that “inconsistent terminology” is used across schools. The confusion lies in the titles of leaders in schools which can include headmaster (or mistress), principal, director, head of school or administrator. A school that houses a primary and secondary school on the same campus may have vice principals of each section and then the principal in charge of all the schools on the campus. For the purposes of this study, I selected the leader in charge of the whole school and the next most senior leader. Three out of the four schools in this selection have primary and secondary schools with someone in charge of the whole school and then either a deputy or vice principal or the principal of the secondary school. Upton College is a high school with one principal and four deputy principals. These roles carry different titles and various responsibilities and as mentioned previously, there is often a division of labour in these different leadership roles. Researching two leaders in one school provided a more detailed examination of each context and enabled a more comprehensive comparative analysis.

## Data Production

In order to gain insight into the life histories of the chosen principals, in-depth interviews were conducted which “...can produce rich and relevant data.” (Ribbins, 2007:207) The interviews focused on how past histories have shaped current practices. Here Atkinson (1998:17) alludes to Bourdieu’s concept of habitus and provides a basis from which to start forming the interview schedule:

*The life story of an educator (...) might focus a majority of the questions on the category of career but also might include many that get at the essence of family dynamics, early education, characteristics and values, and especially questions that identify influences toward career choices. Personal meaning systems, and tendencies toward any profession or worldview, exist in a social, historical, and cultural context.*

In Bourdieu’s terms individuals, as school principals, are shaped by their past experiences, but also by current engagements within the field of education, therefore I chose to approach each principal as a separate case study and make use of “multiple-site case studies” (Bassey, 2007:148).

The interviews included both closed questions to elicit factual information as well as open-ended questions to facilitate thought and discussion (Ribbins, 2007:215). The open-ended questions were designed to encourage more in-depth answers and discussion.

The interview schedule was informed by relevant literature as well as ongoing reflection on the research. “In producing my own schedules, ..., I begin by trying to list all the things I could ask and then reduce this to the things I must ask.” (Ribbins, 2007:215). Like Ribbins, I systematically recorded possible questions with regard to information about what successful principals do in order to frame the questions within the domains of leadership set out in the literature review. In order to operationalise Bourdieu’s theories from the conceptual framework and develop them into an interview schedule, I drew on the example questions set out by Atkinson (1998:43) in his account of life story interviews.

The face-to-face interviews were extensive in order to facilitate depth of questioning and conversation. The interviews followed a semi-structured format in order to allow some undirected conversation. According to Ribbins (2007:209), the semi-structured interview “...entails the researcher broadly controlling the agenda and process of the interview, whilst leaving interviewees free, within limits, to



respond as best they see fit.” The interviews were recorded and transcribed and notes were also taken during the interview.

### Developing the Interview Schedule

Based on the concepts highlighted in the conceptual framework, the interview questions were developed in relation to three central themes in order to separate the different aspects of the principal’s life and later guide the data analysis. These themes enabled the development of questions relating to personal information and history (habitus and capital), education (habitus and capital) and professional life (strategies and field), all with a focus on leadership.

Bourdieu’s notion of habitus provided the theory to understand how each principal understands leadership and guided the choice of information to elicit on each participant’s personal background. This generated a variety of questions about the principal’s parents’ occupations, parents’ qualifications and family dynamics. Although these factors are not directly related to leadership, they are important to understanding the principals’ leadership habitus in terms of their experiences during childhood, how they internalised the effects of these circumstances and how this has affected their life trajectory and current circumstances. The information elicited from asking these questions could also establish the formation of relevant capital which has enabled the participants to achieve their current prestigious positions. Another important aspect regarding each principal’s personal background is the influence of people they perceived as leaders in their earlier experiences. Each principal was asked about their parents as leaders, other family members, possible religious leaders or any other person that has served as a role model, mentor or leader in their lives. Each principal was also asked about the lessons that they learned from their parents and role models, looking for any repeated internalised lessons that led them to their current role and related success.

In each of the three stages of the interview, I asked the principal about any experiences of their own success and how this made them feel. Bourdieu’s theories suggest that experiencing success has an impact on the participants’ relevant capital when entering into the field of education and then subsequently contributes to the achievement of any leadership roles. For example, in the personal

background stage of the questioning, I asked about any experiences of winning in sports or academic prizes to see if there had been any positive experiences of success which could possibly contribute to their leadership habitus and capital. Eliciting other experiences of personal success or success as experienced through family members also contributed to the analysis.

In order to determine what formal training has contributed to the principal's success, the second category of questions related to the education background of the research participants. I gathered data about their qualifications, pre-post training for a leadership position, after-post training for a leadership position and practical, hands-on training for a leadership position. The literature on what successful principals do guided the questions relating to specific learned leadership behaviours.

The third category of questions sought to examine the professional experience of the principals. Professional experience was split into two sub categories: work and leadership experience and leadership practices and behaviours.

Work and leadership experience questions included obtaining data about number of years as a principal, deputy principal, head of department and teacher, subjects taught, years as principal in this school, previous principal (or deputy principal) positions in other schools, any previous professions and any previous leadership experience outside a school setting. This line of questioning contributed to establishing the pathway to school leadership.

The questions relating to leadership practices and behaviours were most closely guided by the identification of leadership behaviour domains identified and set out in the literature review (see page 13). These questions were designed to establish how the principals learned or internalized particular leadership behaviours. I sought to determine if the principals were in fact meeting these criteria defined by the literature and whether they learnt these practices through training and leadership preparation or if they gained this knowledge of leadership through experience, or in fact a combination of the two. This is illustrated in Table 1 within the analytic framework below.

The table shows the logical development from Bourdieu's concepts to specific interview questions. In the process, this involved deciding what specific empirical indicators would realise the abstract concepts, constituting an analytical framework.

Table 1: Analytical Framework

<b><u>Conceptual Framework Theory</u></b>	<b><u>How it relates to the aims of the study</u></b>	<b><u>Broad Questions</u></b>	<b><u>Themes and Specific Questions</u></b>
<b>Habitus</b>  (History)	<p>How have the internalized events and relationships from the principal's personal and education background contributed to shaping their current practices?</p> <p>What forms of capital from the principal's personal and education background have contributed to shaping their current practices and by what means did this capital become available?</p>	<p>What lessons have you learned about leadership from your childhood, family and school days?</p> <p>Personal Background Influence of family life and relationships on current habitus Education Background</p>	<p><b><u>Personal Background</u></b></p> <p>Which family members did you grow up with in your childhood home?</p> <p>Do you have any siblings? What is your birth order?</p> <p>What is your father's highest held qualification?</p> <p>What is your mother's highest held qualification?</p> <p>What was your father's occupation growing up?</p> <p>How did your father view his job? What did you think about your father's work? (Work ethic: good? Learn anything from this work ethic?)</p> <p>Can you tell me something about your father's relationships? How he interacted with others? At work? Home? Elsewhere? (Any lessons on leadership?)</p> <p>What was your mother's occupation growing up?</p> <p>How did your mother view her job? What did you think about your mother's work? (Work ethic: good? Learn anything from this work ethic?)</p> <p>Can you tell me something about your mother's relationships? How she interacted with others? At work? Home? Elsewhere? (Any lessons on</p>

			<p>leadership?)</p> <p>Do you have any particularly strong memories of either of your parents that epitomises their characters?</p> <p>Who else (other possible more user-friendly words: mentor, coach, role model) influenced you in your childhood? (Looking for potential leaders)</p> <p>Examples: parents, grandparents, other family members, religious leaders, family friends</p> <p>What was it about this person that influenced you?</p> <p>What did you want to be when you were a child? A teenager? A university student?</p> <p>Do you remember any of your family members or people close to you that you particularly admired? What did you admire? Do you have any examples? Do you remember how that felt? (Looking for family members or others that experienced success and therefore provided examples of success – can use this notion of experiencing success as a later prompt)</p> <p>What values did your family promote? Which ones stand out? How did you feel about these values? Do you promote them to your students? (What lessons were learned? Examples: commitment, try your best, be productive, respect)</p> <p>Where else did your values or life lessons come from? (Religion, cultural practices?)</p> <p>Do you remember any heroes from your childhood? What did admire most about these heroes? (Fictional or real)</p> <p>What other activities interested you growing up?</p> <p>Do you have your own children? What values do you</p>
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			<p>try to teach them?</p> <p><b><u>Education Background</u></b></p> <p>What school did you attend? (primary/secondary/tertiary)</p> <p>Tell me about your school experience? Did you receive any form of recognition at school? (Leadership positions at school or university? Prefect, sports captain, student council, etc.)</p> <p>Did you like academics?</p> <p>What were your favourite thing(s) about school? (specific subjects, sport) Least favourite?</p> <p>Did you have any big dreams about yourself as an adult? (career, accomplishments, assets, relationships, etc.)</p> <p>Do you have any specific memories of any of your teachers or principals that stand out?</p> <p>Can you remember any experiences of personal success in your childhood? (Academics, sport, other extra mural activities) Do you remember how that felt?</p> <p><b><u>Professional Experiences</u></b></p> <p>What academic qualifications do you hold?</p> <p>Why did you want to become a teacher?</p> <p>What, if any, training did you have before entering a leadership position?</p> <p>What, if any, training did you have after starting in a leadership position?</p> <p>Have you had any practical, hands-on leadership training? (e.g.: job shadowing)</p>
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			What is the most important lesson you learned from your training?
<b>(Potential) Capital</b>  (Current)  (Brackets in the right hand column indicate potential forms of capital.)	<p>How have the internalized events and relationships from the principal's professional background contributed to shaping their current practices?</p> <p>What forms of capital from the principal's professional background have contributed to shaping their current practices and by what means did this capital become available?</p>	<p>What are the current competencies that have developed as a result of habitus? What forms of capital (economic, social, cultural and symbolic) do the principals have at their disposal?</p>	<p>What route did you follow that led you to your current role? (previous leadership roles, including years in each position as well as previous jobs and leadership roles in another profession)</p> <p>How did you become interested in heading a school?</p> <p>What qualities do you have that made you feel comfortable in going for this role? (cultural)</p> <p>Do you feel that teaching prepared you for this post? (cultural)</p> <p>Did anybody help guide/encourage you into choosing your profession? If so, who? How? (social)</p> <p>Do you draw on any previous principals' practices in your own principalship? (social)</p> <p>From where do you draw support for your role as principal? (Who do you turn to for help in difficult times?) (social)</p> <p>What kinds of relationships among staff do you promote at school? Do you feel that you have any particular strengths in interpersonal skills? Are there any areas that you find particularly challenging? (any social activities outside of school, other activities in school) (Promoting a sense of community)</p>
<b>Field</b>  (Engagement with Education)	<p>In what ways has the principal engaged with the field of education?</p>	<p>How does the principal personally engage or facilitate school engagement with education more generally?</p>	<p>Why do you think you were selected for this post?</p> <p>What aspects of the job do you find the most interesting/rewarding? Least interesting/rewarding? Do you find yourself interacting with principals in other schools? Do you belong to any principal or school networks or educational organizations? How is your school accredited? What is the leadership structure above you? What is your relationship with them? Do they come to the school and interact with you? If so, do you find this helpful?</p>

			Talk about a difficult situation at school. How do you deal with this?
<b>Strategies</b> (Current Practice)	What choices have the principals made either consciously or unconsciously as a result of habitus and contextual factors that have influenced their current practices?	<u>Current practices of successful principals (based on the literature):</u> Have a strong commitment to the school's vision, mission and goals Promote shared leadership Have a strong focus on instruction Hold certain values Build strong relationships and communicate effectively Engage in a community of professional learning Maintain a strong focus on training and developing	<b><u>Current Practices</u></b>  What do you consider to be the most important features of successful school leadership? Can you give an example?  Why do you think this is important?  Where and when did you start doing this?  Who or what taught you that this was important?  <u>Questions based on the Literature Review:</u> What are the most important goals in the school? To you? To the board? To other school leaders? To the teachers? Do these groups all agree on these goals? How did they originate? (Any agreement or conflict surrounding the goals?) How are these reviewed? Are they communicated to the school community? How? Can you tell me something about the particular ethos of your school?  <u>Promoting shared leadership:</u> What is the leadership structure at your school? Who is responsible for making decisions in your school? Through what process are decisions made? What decisions need staff consensus before being made? Who is able to make decisions on your behalf when you are absent?  <u>Strong focus on instruction:</u> As school principal, what is your role in relation to classroom practices? How do you support teachers to be the best educators they can be? What process do you follow to deal with a teacher that does not meet your expectations? What is your role in relation to curriculum

			<p>development and monitoring? Do you receive any curriculum support?</p> <p>Are you happy with your school's matric/exam results?</p> <p><u>Hold certain values:</u></p> <p>What values do you hold onto for the effective running of the school?</p> <p><u>Build strong relationships and communicate effectively?</u></p> <p>What role do you play in relation to the way teachers relate to each other or experience the workplace? (Any social activities promoted that enhance professional life/make it an enjoyable place to work?)</p> <p>How do you communicate decisions and other information to the teachers?</p> <p><u>Engage in a community of professional learning:</u></p> <p>In what ways do you facilitate conversation around teaching and learning?</p> <p><u>Maintain a strong focus on training and developing:</u></p> <p>How do you support the training and development of your teachers and administrative staff?</p> <p>Are there internal and/or external opportunities for teacher training?</p> <p>Do teachers in your school collaborate? In what ways? Is this an important part of teacher practice at your school?</p>
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Table 1: Analytic Framework

### Piloting the Interview

Prior to commencing the research with the chosen schools, the interview was piloted with a different school principal in order to elicit feedback about the questions, interview style and overall reaction to the length and detail of the interview. This provided valuable insight into the interview process.

Specifically, asking questions about personal background can be more daunting than questions relating to more professional concerns. Having practice with this enabled me to feel more comfortable with the



questions in subsequent interviews. I also learnt that the interviewer has to be flexible with the sequence of questions as the interview is conducted in a conversational manner. Familiarity with the questions was important in order to know what questions to return to, if previously skipped over and also to ensure that questions are not repeated. As Walford (2012:112) explains, “the interviewer must be prepared to ask follow-up and clarification questions and to divert from any set ordering of questions.” My pilot participant felt that the questions were relevant and he was not concerned with the length of the interview. I had concerns about the timing of the interview, so this feedback was crucial to my confidence in conducting the interviews with the other principals.

*“It is commonly argued that researchers need to be sure that they are not intimidated by those they are interviewing, and make sure that their agenda is followed rather than that of the interviewee.” (Walford, 2012:113)*

The pilot interview also served to lessen the impact of the power relation between interviewer and interviewee. Due to the nature of each principal’s status, the research in this study is more in line with Walford’s term ‘studying-up’ rather than what he explains to be “more common forms of research where the researcher is usually seen as having more power than the researched.” (Walford, 2012:111). Interviewing candidates who hold prestigious positions can be intimidating and piloting the interview afforded me the necessary preparation to feel confident in the interview process.

## Reliability, Validity and Generalizability

As Yin (1994) explains, reliability, validity and generalizability are the criteria used for judging the quality of research design. The following sections illustrate how I have reflected on each one in order to ensure the quality of this study.

### Reliability

Reliability refers to the notion that if a study is repeated, it will have the same result. The following two quotes provide definitions of reliability:

*“...reliability relates to the probability that repeating a research procedure or method would produce identical or similar results. It provides a degree of confidence that replicating the process would ensure consistency.” (Ribbins, 2007:92)*

*“Reliability is the extent to which a test or procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions.” (Bell, 2005:117)*

The case-study method and semi-structured interviews both have implications for the reliability of this study. As Bassey (2007:144) points out, “Reliability is an impractical concept for case study since by its nature a case study is a one-off event and therefore not open to exact replication.”

As the “...interviewee contributes to shaping the conversation” (Ribbins, 2007:94), it would be difficult for a subsequent researcher to get the same answers and results as a previous researcher in a semi-structured interview format. It is not only the format of the interview that brings reliability into question, but also the nature of contextual differences in schools. “The increasing recognition that each school provides a distinctive context for practicing school leadership increases the difficulties involved in seeking reliability in interview research.” (Ribbins, 2007:95).

Although this study is not able to be replicated exactly, the credibility of this study doesn't rely on reliability as much as on validity.

## Validity

Validity requires researchers to ask themselves if their answers measure what they're trying to measure (Bell, 2005:118). How trustworthy are the results? Ribbins (2007:97) offers a similar definition: "The concept of validity is used to judge whether the research accurately describes the phenomenon that it is intended to describe."

In designing this study, consideration was given to descriptive validity as explained by Maxwell (1992:285), with further detail below.

Descriptive validity requires an accurate account of the situation and data in order to ensure that what is heard is not distorted in any way. In order to avoid misinterpretations, the interviews were recorded and transcribed to record exact data and notes from the interviews contributed to providing a complete picture. Both the transcripts and notes were used to systematically record the data in preparation for analysis.

According to Maxwell (2008:243), there are two main threats to validity: researcher bias and reactivity (the effect of the researcher on the setting or individual).

*"...in qualitative research, the main concern is not with eliminating variance between researchers in the values and expectations that they bring to the study but with understanding how a particular researcher's values influence the conduct and conclusions of the study."  
(Maxwell, 2008:243)*

Careful consideration was therefore given in order to consider researcher bias. Being aware of the problems of bias and regular questioning and reflection of practice all served to reduce the threat of researcher bias (Bell, 2005:166). Careful recording of data, systematic coding of data and only interpreting what was communicated all contributed to lessening the effects of researcher bias.

Reactivity refers to the effect of the researcher on the participants of the study. Maxwell claims that it is more important for the researcher to be aware of this influence and how to use it most "productively (and ethically)" (Maxwell, 2008:243). Throughout the research process, I carefully considered how I might affect or influence the interviews. I felt that having both teaching and school

leadership in common with the principals contributed to establishing a connection with them. Walford states that, “It is common to much research that the researchers often play on what commonalities they have with respondents to gain access and to maintain rapport throughout the research process.” (Walford, 2012:115). The aim was not to remove the influence of reactivity, but to enhance the interview experience by capitalizing on the common ground shared between researcher and interviewee and allowing this to guide the interviewees to be more open and therefore positively impacting on validity.

### Generalizability

The nature of qualitative research doesn’t lend itself to empirical generalizability as single sites or small samples are often studied. According to Maxwell (1992:293), “Generalizability refers to the extent to which one can extend the account of a particular situation or population to other persons, times, or settings than those directly studied.” As Yin (1994:37) explains, increasing the number of principals to interview will not increase the generalizability of the research as no sample size can counter the common complaint against this type of qualitative study.

Although empirical generalizability is not possible in a study of eight principals, this study aims to achieve theoretical insight into the relationship between the history of the principal and leadership activities of the principal and the ethos of each school and what counts as good leadership in each context. This will impact the conceptualization of future studies by highlighting patterns of connections across the principals’ life and career trajectories and current practices within their specific contexts.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The research conducted in this study was set out in accordance with the guidelines in the UCT ethics documentation, and ethics clearance was obtained before conducting the study. Furthermore, I adhered to Kilbourn’s clear parameters about ethics in conducting research, as outlined by the following quote:

*“Anyone intending to do research involving people should (1) not be naïve concerning issues of power and privilege, (2) thoroughly understand (not simply be familiar with) the implications of ethical concepts such as risk, no intent to harm, informed consent, and the right to withdraw, (3) adhere to the formal ethical protocols of the university and, where warranted, the host institution at which the research will be undertaken, and (4) most important, act ethically.” (Kilbourn, 2006:559).*

As Walford (2012) has indicated, consideration of power relations in the interview process was important to this study. The nature of interviewing someone in a high-status position brings its own set of implications. I approached these high-status principals as a student, but they were aware of my status as a vice principal of a junior school and were able to position me within their field and I used this common ground to establish a rapport with the principals. As their schools are better known and each principal was either head of the whole school or senior school, they held more symbolic capital in the field than I did as the interviewer. In this study, one might say that the interviewees had more power than the interviewer. As a result of this, the interviewees could have tried to control the direction of the interview. This was not however, the case. The interviewees followed the questions as set out in the interview schedule.

The interviews undertaken in this study were extensive and unthreatening. These criteria for meeting ethics procedures were taken into account at every stage of the research. The following procedures were adhered to:

- Informed consent was obtained from all participants.
- The research participants were made aware of the fact that direct quotes from the interviews could be used in writing.
- The research participants were asked if the interview could be recorded and transcribed.
- The participants were able to withdraw from the study at any time.
- The participants have remained anonymous and pseudonyms have been used in this paper.

## Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data from the interviews, I used the themes set out in the analytic framework as a starting point. The data was grouped into the following four categories: personal background (habitus), education background (habitus), professional experience (capital, strategies and field) and current practices (strategies and field).

Analyzing the data occurred in three stages. In stage one I lifted out data segments that pertained to these themes, derived from the questions in the interview schedule. This involved systematically recording the data into tables across the eight principals, contributing to the profiles of each principal and their practices.

Stage two involved lifting out the similarities and differences in the data. Looking across the data for the eight principals, I identified categories for comparison and contrast which informed the analysis on each principal, their background, education, experiences and current practices.

These included the following:

- Personal Background
  - Values
  - Values: Work ethic
  - Career aspirations
- Education Background
  - Leadership roles and sports
  - School experience
  - Role models from school
  - Leadership qualifications
- Professional Experiences
  - Economic capital
  - Symbolic capital

- Cultural capital
- Social capital
- Field
- Strategies
- Professional Practices
  - The degree of coherence with regards to a collective understanding of purpose
  - The degree to which various members of staff take on responsibilities in the school
  - The amount of focus placed on instruction
  - The degree to which teachers work collectively
  - What forms of formal and informal training have been followed by staff members and are available to staff
  - The degree to which the principals focus on relationships within the school
  - The degree to which the school community feels informed about the operation and activities of school
  - The degree to which the values of the school leaders align with the ethos of the school

In stage three, I went back to the various data segments and identified them as relating to capital when relevant. Some questions were designed to elicit data relating to certain capitals which are relevant in the field of education, but what counts as capital for one person might not be considered capital for another. Therefore, other questions which didn't have the primary intention of eliciting data on capital, did in some cases reveal certain capital. Although I expected to find a lot of data relating to capital in the professional background section, I carefully analysed each section for data relevant to capital.

## Chapter 5: Presentation of the Findings of the Study

This chapter presents the findings from the data analysis with the aim of understanding how principals lead in each of the four different elite school contexts, with particular reference to personal background, education background, professional experience and current practices. I begin by introducing each of the principals, then move onto highlighting the similarities and differences between them and finally relate the findings to habitus, capital, field and strategies where relevant.

### Introduction to the Eight Principals

Out of the eight principals interviewed, all eight were white, six were male, two were female and all eight have a Christian background.

Mr. Knight (A1) grew up with his mother, father and five siblings. He is the fourth child of six and has a twin brother. His father holds a matric certificate and a farming diploma while his mother finished school with Cambridge O levels. His father worked as a farmer and his mother worked as a housewife and peripatetic ballet teacher. His father was passionate about farming and Mr. Knight (A1) respected his father's work immensely, even considering becoming a farmer in later life. He perceived his mother as being dedicated to her role as a housewife and to caring for others. He believes that both parents were well respected in their community and enjoyed good relationships both at work and at home. His parents promoted strong values which include doing the right thing, sharing, telling the truth, working hard, appreciating what you have and caring for others.

Mr. Knight (A1) has children of his own and reports that he has passed on these same values to them. The role of the family had a strong influence on this principal and he identified his aunt and uncle on a neighbouring farm as other influential people in his life. He felt that they modelled strong Christian values and were, as a result, great role models to him and his siblings. Growing up, Mr. Knight (A1) always wanted to be a farmer or a teacher.

Mr. Robertson (A2) grew up as the second of four children with both his mother and father at home. Both his parents held matric certificates, but no further formal qualifications. His father worked as a programmer while his mother worked as a secretary, a church secretary and church counsellor. Both



parents had a strong work ethic, but they viewed work in different ways. The father accepted work as something that had to be done, as explained by Mr. Robertson (A2), “he came from the era where you went to work every day without question, and he worked really hard at it.” The mother seemed to really enjoy what she did and sometimes almost took on her work commitments at the expense of her children, feeling that the children had to wait while she counselled her clients. The father wasn’t very gregarious and didn’t really spend time on developing relationships at work. The mother, however, was described as the “light and soul of the party”, always hosting dinner parties and taking part in many social activities.

The most important values that Mr. Robertson (A2) believes he learnt from his parents during his childhood were honesty and respect, which he feels were modelled more than taught explicitly. In order to highlight the value of honesty, he recounted a story about his father who wouldn’t borrow a pencil from his workplace because the pencil belonged to his work and not him. From years of these types of behaviours being modelled around him, Mr. Robertson (A2) internalized these values and they are now an intrinsic part of who he is. He reports that he has passed these same values onto his own children and students and believes he has to model them as they were modelled for him. Honesty and respect are part of his habitus, which in turn shapes how he views and interacts with the world around him.

Potential leaders that influenced Mr. Robertson (A2) along the way include his parents, his church, his parents’ friends, various teachers - especially a particular Geography teacher - and the leaders at Boy Scouts.

Mr. Hill (B1) grew up as the youngest child with his parents and two older brothers. His father had a Bachelor of Commerce degree and later worked hard to achieve a Masters’ degree in Environmental Science. His mother was a qualified nursing sister and midwife. His father worked as a draughtsman and then a cartographer and lecturer. He didn’t particularly enjoy being a draughtsman but loved being a cartographer and lecturer. He “had a very sort of Protestant Puritan work ethic and you know, what you put in is what you get out”. Mr. Hill (B1) talks about his own work ethic being the same, if not stronger, than his father’s. His father was a very “present father” who worked hard, was a committed church-goer and a very sociable person that others sought out to chat with. Although his mother was a

qualified nursing sister, she worked as a full time mother while her children were at home. She was very committed to this and felt that this was her “prime calling”, and both parents were invested in this. He perceived his mother as being a very sincere, loving, welcoming, forgiving and tolerant person that took in the waifs and strays of society.

Mr. Hill’s (B1) older brother played a big part in his life and he looked up to him as someone who was sporty, academic and successful in everything he did. “He went through life doing everything and being successful at things and just embraced the fullness of life.” Church pastors were also very influential, as religion played a big part in Mr. Hill’s (B1) life. The values that his family promoted and taught include love, acceptance, respect, a sense of responsibility, taking ownership of your life, kindness and “basic Christian values”. Mr. Hill (B1) certainly feels that he passes these same values onto his children. While growing up, he wanted to become a teacher.

Mrs. Palmer (B2) grew up as the younger of two sisters with both her mother and her father. Her father was educated in London and left school with his O levels while her mother has a secretarial diploma. Her father loved working as a travel agent and she believes that he had a strong work ethic. He enjoyed the fact that there were so many people at work as he was a very sociable person. Her mother worked as a housewife and joined church groups and women’s groups as an outlet for her sociability. Her maternal grandfather was also a strong influence in her life.

The strongest values that Mrs. Palmer’s (B2) family taught her were respect your elders, work hard, honesty, being able to articulate and interact with others. These were all expectations of the two children and they were also modelled by the parents. Mrs. Palmer doesn’t have children of her own but feels that she passes these same values onto the students at school as she feels they are very important. Adding to these values, she also stressed the importance of having balance in life, tolerance, a sense of humour and being open to people. Growing up, she always wanted to be a teacher. She would line her teddy bears up in her bedroom to teach them and her sister told her that she was so bossy that she had to become a teacher.

Mr. Lewis (C1) grew up as the fourth son in a family of four boys with his mother and his father. His three older brothers are a lot older than he is and he therefore spent a number of years at home as an only child. His parents hold matric certificates, but no further formal qualifications. His mother worked

as a saleslady and his father worked for the South African Navy. Both parents worked while he was growing up and enjoyed their jobs and, according to Mr. Lewis, had strong work ethics. He perceived both parents as being very popular, outgoing people who enjoyed socializing with friends. His father was very sporty and this played a big part in all of their lives. Both parents loved life and there was always a positive atmosphere at home. Mr. Lewis (C1) only brought up one value that his parents taught him, but he feels it is the value that permeates everything: respect. He believes that his parents modelled this value and he holds onto the value of respect in raising his own children, even jokingly reporting that “they mock me terribly about the respect thing”.

Mrs. Morris (C2) grew up as the youngest of four children with both parents. Her father’s highest held qualification is a school-leaving certificate as this was during the depression and he left school to feed his family. Her mother left school early without qualifications. Regardless of his lack of qualifications, her father worked his way up to become operations manager for a large corporation. Mrs. Morris (C2) got the impression that her father enjoyed his job and she thought that it was an important one. He was traditional and did what was expected of him. He was also well respected, listened a lot and a church leader. Her mother worked in a factory for a while and was then a stay at home housewife. She was quiet, shy, insecure and suffered from depression. Mrs. Morris (C2) remembers having to look after her mother a lot while she was growing up.

People that influenced her during her childhood include youth group leaders, her brother and teachers at school. She particularly admired a mathematics teacher and grew up to be a mathematics teacher herself after always wanting to enter the profession as a child. The values that she learned from her family while growing up include a strong importance placed on school, commitment, family loyalty and the idea of moving from a working class background up the social scale. She also learnt respect and other values from her involvement with the church. She has children of her own with whom she has promoted commitment and respect and encourages hard work and planning ahead, but doesn’t want to force any value system on them.

Mr. Johnson (D1) grew up with his parents in his childhood home. Although he has three older siblings, he was much younger and therefore grew up mainly as an only child. Both his parents hold matric certificates as their highest qualifications. His father worked as a businessman, but didn’t enjoy it and

complained about work and resenting his job. Mr. Johnson (D1) explained that his father was tired from work and had few friends and therefore couldn't really comment on his relationships and how others saw him. His mother was a housewife, which she didn't enjoy. He explained that his parents were older than other parents with children his age and therefore seldom interacted with others. His parents taught him conservative values based on the Christian religion as well as hard work and thrift. He explains that his faith has been an important pillar for his values. He promotes these values both to his own children and to his students. Another part of his life that had a major influence on him was learning about and taking part in mountaineering and rock climbing. While at university, Mr. Johnson (D1) decided on teaching as a career.

Mr. Parker (D2) grew up with his father and two younger sisters. His mother was an alcoholic and left home when he was quite young. Neither of his parents held any formal qualifications. His father was a shift boss on the mines which he wasn't passionate about but he "stuck it out".

Mr Parker remembered his father as a hard man who had a difficult childhood, but also as a very popular man, a good sportsman and an extrovert. His mother couldn't hold onto any jobs due to her alcoholism but she was also very popular and always the "belle of the ball". His parents got married and had three children very quickly which, he believes, his mother found difficult to cope with. She eventually left the home when Mr. Parker (D2) was about eleven. He spent a lot of time with his aunt and cousins during school holidays and his dad remarried five times. The values he learnt growing up include 'don't cry or whine about things, get on with it; if you're going to do something, do it well; honesty, integrity and being open'.

Other people that positively influenced his life include his grandmother, athletics coach at school and two teachers. It is one of these teachers that helped him realize that he wanted to be a teacher himself. He doesn't have any children himself, but does promote the values that he learnt in his childhood to them.

## Similarities and Differences

The next section will consider similarities and differences between the eight principals with regard to their personal backgrounds, education backgrounds, professional experiences and current practices.

### Personal Background

There are considerable similarities between the eight principals with regard to their childhood experiences, the values of their parents, and the various forms of capital which these experiences made available to them. The section on personal background seeks to specifically answer the following questions:

- How have the internalized events and relationships from the principal's personal background contributed to shaping their current practices?
- What forms of capital from the principal's personal and education background have contributed to shaping their current practices and by what means did this capital become available?

### Values

The values that each principal learned were deeply internalized as part of their habitus. All eight principals credit their parents with the values that they now teach to their own children and the students at their schools. As highlighted in the literature review, the values a principal holds and communicates to the school strongly contribute to their approach to leadership. The principals hold onto a range of values, but honesty and respect were directly or indirectly mentioned as the most common values. Other values mentioned include integrity, acceptance, hard work, responsibility, kindness and loyalty. Although all eight principals attribute these values to the lessons they learned from their parents, there is also a link with the church. Six out of the eight principals talked about learning life lessons and values from the church.

This link with the church provided three of the four principals that work in religiously affiliated schools (St. Stephen's and St. Margaret's) with cultural capital, in so far as the ethos of the church was aligned

with the ethos of their particular schools. From these two schools, only Mrs. Palmer (B2) did not mention the church with regards to where she learned her values.

Church and Christianity did play a role in the lives of the other four principals, but they now work in non-denominational schools (Upton College and Hilldale College) and being aligned with a specific religion doesn't provide them with cultural capital in quite the same way.

The acceptance and internalisation of these values suggest an acceptance of the status quo and of social authority and social hierarchies. Respect was mentioned very often by the principals during their interviews, who submitted to the authority of their teachers when they were at school themselves. The values they internalised were relatively traditional and conformist.

#### Values: Work Ethic

Five out of the eight fathers of the principals enjoyed their jobs. Descriptions of how their fathers viewed their jobs ranged from "passionate" to "you would carry him out of his job in a coffin" to "it was his life". Mr. Robertson (A2), one of the remaining three, explained that his father "was from the era that you went to work without complaining". The fathers of both the principals at Hilldale College, however, didn't seem to enjoy their work. Besides these two outliers, it could be argued that the first six fathers provided their children with a good sense of a strong work ethic and modelled this for them in their own careers, which they have in turn internalized and drawn on as they moved through their careers. Although three of the fathers didn't show passion for their jobs, they still "stuck it out", as Mr. Parker (D2) explained. These fathers also modelled a strong work ethic, showing that commitment and perseverance are important, regardless of job satisfaction.

While some of the principals' mothers held various part time jobs, six out of the eight mothers worked mostly as housewives while their children were at school. One mother worked as a saleslady in a local clothing store and the eighth mother could not work due to alcoholism. Five out of the eight mothers really enjoyed their chosen careers. Comments include "her life was dedicated to caring and providing for her family and others", "it was her prime calling" and "she loved it and worked very hard". Four out of these five mothers demonstrated a strong service ethic to their children, whether by counselling at church, or "attracting the waifs and strays and always helping people out". Teaching is seen to be a

service career and these mothers modelled this service ethic, possibly paving the way for these principals to choose a career in teaching.

Although there are major similarities with regard to their relationships with their parents, there were also differences. Two of the principals had difficult relationships with their mothers due to depression and alcoholism. Mrs. Morris' (C2) mother suffered from depression and wasn't always able to be there for her children. Mr. Parker's (D2) family life wasn't stable due to his mother being an alcoholic and his having to live with a number of stepmothers that he labelled as "stepmonsters". Although these are complex exceptions, both of these principals still came back to the values their parents espoused, aligning them with the other principals in terms of traditional values and respect for social institutions such as family, school and church.

#### Career aspirations

Although the principals arrived at their career decisions at various stages in their lives, all eight of them knew they wanted to be teachers. Seven out of the eight knew they wanted to be a teacher before leaving high school and Mr. Johnson (D1) arrived at this decision at university. In all cases, teaching was either the only possible career or one of two possible careers. This career choice could be related to the fact that all eight principals referred to various teachers that acted as role models, leaders and positive influences in their lives, highlighting the strong impact of role models. This common experience of teacher role models provided the principals with cultural capital, contributing to their successful career trajectories.

Out of the sixteen parents of the principals, three parents have no formal qualification, seven parents have some form of a secondary school diploma, five parents have some form of post-school diploma and one parent holds a Master's degree. Other than the Master's degree, none of the parents hold a university level qualification. In light of this, the career aspirations of these principals could be explained as a form of intended social mobility. They wanted to be teachers, were influenced by teachers and were able to enter careers which could be seen as a step up from the careers of their parents.

Another possible reason for such a common career aspiration could be related to the principals' own school experiences, which will be explored in the next section analysing the education background of each principal.

## Education Background

In this section, I consider what forms of capital from the principal's education background have contributed to shaping their current practices and by what means this capital became available.

### Leadership Roles and Sports

The education pathways of the principals in this study are of particular interest. Their education backgrounds speak to Bourdieu's notion of social and cultural reproduction in that "capital finds its way to capital and that the social structure tends to perpetuate itself" (Bourdieu, 1998:19, see also Lingard, B. et al, 2003).

Mr. Johnson (D1) attended an elite school and the other seven principals attended high-functioning, well-established schools that prepared them well for their careers. They had access to good academic programmes, various sporting opportunities, cultural programs and good facilities. The prestige that is associated with attending 'good' schools provided these principals with symbolic capital, enabling them to feel comfortable in seeking out roles in prestigious schools.

The most obvious similarity that stands out clearly amongst the eight principals, is the leadership roles that seven of them held in high school. Four of the eight principals were Head Boy or Head Girl of their schools, while four of them were prefects. Mr. Lewis (C1) held two of these leadership roles as both a prefect in Grade 11 and Head Boy in Grade 12. Mr. Parker (D2) was the only principal that didn't hold a leadership role in high school. Teachers later commented to him that he should have been Head Boy, but he explained that he only started to like high school in his last year and therefore felt he wouldn't have been ready. These principals experienced leadership roles at school and carried this cultural capital with them through to their careers.



Apart from the top leadership roles in school, all eight principals received some form of recognition for their accomplishments, to varying degrees. Five of the six principals at St. Stephen's, St. Margaret's and Upton College were either captain of their sports teams or were awarded colours for their achievements in a particular sport, when they were at school. This is significant because the three schools currently headed by these principals hold sport in the same esteem as academics, therefore it would be plausible to make the connection between the habitus of these principals and the ethos of their chosen schools. Although the sixth principal from this particular grouping, Mrs. Palmer (B2), did not receive specific recognition for her contribution towards sport, she still enjoyed being part of a team and happily took part in team sports.

Interestingly, the ethos of Hilldale College is different: sport is part of their daily life but doesn't have as much of a focus as academics. Both principals interviewed at this school had a different relationship with sport growing up as compared to the principals at the other three schools. Mr. Johnson (D1) ran the mountain club at school and feels that he learned more about leadership from mountaineering than anywhere else. He viewed the school where he spent his entire school career as "a rough and brutal place back then ... it was a rugby and cricket besotted school". Mr. Parker's (D2) father was a top, well-known sportsman and he felt he lived in his father's shadow and therefore resisted any of the most popular South African sports. As explained above, he felt that he started coming into his own in his last year of school and this is when he joined the athletics team. He enjoyed the success of winning the hurdles races, but it felt bittersweet because he had some regret that he didn't get into it earlier. This particular aspect of these two principals' backgrounds aligns with the ethos of their current schools.

### School Experience

All eight principals enjoyed their school experiences to varying degrees. Both of the principals at St. Stephen's and St. Margaret's and Mr. Lewis (C1) thoroughly enjoyed their school experience and spoke very highly of their school days. Mrs. Palmer (C2) really enjoyed her school career but wasn't quite as enthusiastic about it as the others. These six principals took advantage of the many opportunities made available to them.

Mr. Johnson (D1), as explained above, did not enjoy his school and thought of it as a terrible place, even though he did enjoy some of the teachers and held a leadership role as a prefect. Mr. Parker (D2) enjoyed his first primary school and his last year at school, but not the years in between, possibly in part as a result of his difficult home life.

Regardless of whether or not they enjoyed their school years, all eight principals conformed to the status quo, accepting and following the rules set out by their families, teachers and schools. They all respected their teachers and were committed to their education. They either enjoyed their schooling or their teachers and as a result of the values set out by their family and school, they respected schooling as an institution and went on to contribute to its continuation.

### Role Models from School

All eight principals were able to reflect back to school and highlight teachers that had a positive influence on them. The principals talked about these teachers as being “committed”, “passionate” and “having great character”. These teachers acted as role models and contributed to the principals’ decision to become teachers themselves, whether by overtly guiding them into teaching or indirectly through identification with their roles. Four of the principals talked explicitly about a specific teacher whose teaching paths they followed, studying and teaching the same subjects as these teachers. All eight principals were therefore able to draw on this model as a form of cultural capital through the progression of their careers.

### Leadership Qualifications

For these principals, the majority of leadership training was via job shadowing and informal mentoring. The leadership qualifications of these eight principals vary. The only principal to hold formal tertiary qualifications in leadership or management is Mr. Robertson (A2) who holds an Honours degree in Leadership and Management. Mr. Hill (B1) attended a four week leadership development programme and Mrs. Palmer (B2) had a module on management and leadership in her Bachelor of Education degree. Mr. Johnson (D1) holds a post graduate certificate in management.

These principals are predominantly drawing on their informal training, such as previous positions and the practices of role models, rather than explicit or formal leadership training to inform and guide their

practice. Although these principals do not hold many leadership qualifications among them, they are drawing on various forms of cultural capital in order to inform their current practices and navigate the daily demands of their specific contexts. This is interesting in light of the call for more formal training for school leaders, found in some of the education literature.

## **Professional Experience**

This section examines how the internalized events and relationships from the principals' professional backgrounds contributed to shaping their current practices and gave them access to capital on which to draw.

### Economic Capital

Economic capital is central to the concept of elite schools, where privilege is affordable as a result of capital. The available economic capital of the parents at these schools allows them to send their children to these elite schools. Mr. Johnson (D1) attended an elite school himself, matching the economic background of his family with the available economic capital within the school he currently leads. The other seven principals attended high-functioning, well-resourced schools, with many opportunities available. Although their families did not have a lot of available economic capital from which to draw, these principals were able to gain places in schools that enabled them to move up the social scale, where economic capital is more available.

### Symbolic Capital

Each principal has some form of symbolic capital at their disposal. All eight principals had attended good schools, which enabled them to feel comfortable in their current environments and to acquire these positions of stature. Before entering their current positions, all eight principals had held leadership positions in other schools, providing them not only with 'know how', but also with a certain amount of stature to support the achievement of their current positions. The schools they worked in previously range in prestige, but it is clear that these previous positions would provide them with some

of the capital they needed to obtain their current prestigious roles. Mr. Parker's (D2) experience includes top leadership roles in international schools abroad, aligning his previous experience with the ethos of his current school. Mr. Knight (A1), Mr. Hill (B1) and Mr. Johnson (D1) all held leadership positions in elite schools before leading their current schools. Mr. Robertson (A2), Mrs. Palmer (B2) and Mr. Lewis (C2) have all held top leadership positions in high-functioning, well-known schools.

### Cultural Capital

All eight principals identified certain attributes that they have that made them feel comfortable in applying for a principal's or deputy principal's post. These include interpersonal skills, strategic thinking, positivity, consistency, respect, built up experience and having vision.

Another form of cultural capital that the principals draw on in their current positions is the preparation that teaching brings to their current leadership positions. Six out of the eight principals agree that teaching prepares you for a top leadership position in a school. Mr. Hill (B1) explains that, although the reality is that a head has been a teacher, it was the extra responsibilities that he picked up along the way that prepared him as teaching doesn't, according to him, prepare you for the "strategic and leadership weight that you've got to carry in leading a school". Although worded differently, Mr Johnson's (D1) comments echoed those of Mr. Hill (B1).

Drawing on previous principals' practices provides the principals with a further form of cultural capital. Seven out of the eight principals confirm that they refer to the practices of previous principals, whether from their school days or their teaching days. Sometimes the experiences provide them with models to emulate and at other times they draw on previous experiences which guide them regarding what *not* to do in particular situations. Whether through teaching experience or other leadership roles, all eight principals are able to draw on cultural capital from previous experiences to help guide them in their current roles and inform their strategies within the field.

Rather than formal leadership training, these principals predominantly rely on their informal training, and predominantly their previous leadership positions, to guide them in their practice as principals. Their acquired cultural capital, knowing how to do something, therefore becomes even more relevant

and important. They are using their professional experiences and emulating previous leaders, ultimately tacitly drawing on their habitus and capital to inform their practices.

### Social Capital

Seven out of the eight principals were able to draw on social capital at some point in their careers, enabling them to fill a position resulting from personal connections. Mr. Robertson (A2), Mr. Hill (B1), Mrs. Palmer (B2) and Mr. Parker (D2) all acquired their first teaching positions via word of mouth. Mr. Lewis (C1) and Mr. Johnson (D1) were hired for positions at schools later in their careers due to personal connections. And finally, Mr. Knight (A1) was headhunted in order to fill a principal position at another elite school.

Another form of social capital that helps them in their careers is the various forms of support they receive in their roles. Five out of the eight principals specifically mentioned their spouses providing them with important support, while five principals mentioned that they draw support from their colleagues, especially others in leadership roles. Both formal and informal networks within and across schools have set up important supportive connections.

### Interaction with the Field

This section examines the ways in which the principals have engaged with the field of education.

When the principals were asked why they thought they were selected for their current posts, the most commonly offered reason was that they had experience and that they were the right fit for the school, either in personality or in fitting the school tradition. This would suggest a link between the ethos of the schools in this study and the leaders running them. Other reasons why the principals thought that they were selected for these prestigious posts include good references, being a woman (Mrs. Morris C2), being in the right place at the right time and personality. Mrs. Morris (C2) also explained that “the ethos of the school was one I wanted to be a part of”.

When asked whether they chose to interact with principals from other schools, six out of the eight principals confirmed that they do and for the most part they find this network very supportive. Some of the heads and deputies belong to formal organisations and others have formed their own personal

networks with colleagues in similar roles in other schools. Out of the two that said they don't interact with principals from other schools, Mrs. Morris (C2) said she would like to and is going to investigate this possibility and Mr. Parker (D2) said he just didn't have enough time due to the various roles he performs at school.

Understanding what parts of the job these principals find the most interesting and rewarding and least interesting and rewarding contributes to the overall picture of how they engage with the field. There were varied responses to questions about the most and least interesting parts of the job, but there are some common themes that arise. Six of the eight principals talk about thinking strategically, putting systems in place, planning, solving problems, forging the long term vision and providing the environment in which the most effective teaching and learning can take place as aspects of the job that they find the most interesting or rewarding. These principals are engaging with the field of education and strategising how best to take their own institutions forward for the common good of the people that make up their school community. This, they say, is what challenges and rewards them. Mr. Knight (A1) spoke mainly of the interaction with the boys in his school and being part of the daily life of the school as the most rewarding aspect of the job. He attended similar schools to the one he leads and he is committed to schooling as an institution. He wants to perpetuate the ethos of his school which lies in a strong tradition of all-boys schooling with a concentration on developing the whole man through academics, sport, art and culture. Mr. Lewis (C1) highlights his most rewarding aspect of the job as the calibre of students and parents that he encounters on a daily basis, as well as the competent staff that he relies on, which allows him the time to fully embrace the public relations aspects of the job which he so enjoys.

The most common aspect of the job that the principals found the least rewarding relate to the more administrative tasks of management as opposed to leadership. Six out of the eight principals talk about dealing with administrative tasks which include managing unrealistic parent expectations, report card duties, dealing with conflict, enforcing rules of dress code, punctuality and attitudes with staff and continual complaints from parents. Dealing with parents and staff is a common theme for the least rewarding aspects of the job. They held the view that parents that don't buy into something that they

are doing or staff that don't meet expectations create conflict, and this can be difficult to manage. Mr. Johnson (D1) refers to managing this conflict as being at the "zone of maximum complaints".

The two outliers in this section have very different explanations for their least rewarding aspects of the job. Mrs. Palmer (B2) mentions that being a deputy can sometimes be difficult because the philosophy and ethos behind some actions taken at school are not necessarily her own and she therefore has to amend her own philosophy and ethos in order to stand behind decisions taken that she might have done differently. Although Mrs. Palmer (B2) highlights some disparity between her own philosophy and that of the school in this comment, her stated values and goals very much align with the philosophy and vision of the school as a whole. Mr. Lewis (C1) explains that his least interesting aspect of the job comes with the interaction with middle management in the Department of Education. He finds this particular section of the department inefficient and explains that this makes certain aspects of running a school difficult.

### Strategies

This section examines what choices the principals have made, either consciously or unconsciously, the ways they enact practices and the contextual factors that have influenced their current practices, highlighting the important relationship between "individual agency and structural determinism" (Eacott, 2010:267), as referenced in the literature review.

With the exception of Mrs. Palmer (B2) and Mrs. Morris (C2), these principals (including all the top leaders in the four schools) were willing to travel to accept jobs at higher levels on the hierarchical structure. This illustrates that they were clearly driven and intended on manoeuvring into these positions of stature and prestige. They were willing to uproot families and adapt to new surroundings in order to improve their level of experience, slowly moving towards these sought after positions. This decision enabled them to learn new strategies and see how things operate in different contexts, contributing to their informal training. Understandably, they tended to focus on developing competences relating to what they considered to be the most important features of successful leadership. The next section outlines what they considered these features to be.

Mr. Knight (A1) believes that you have to enjoy what you're doing and to be passionate about it. You have to know who you are and be able to role model what you expect to see in others. He also believes that consultative decision making is important and leaders have to work hard and be visible.

Mr. Robertson (A2) feels that successful leadership varies according to the school and its environment and a principal needs to be able to adapt and grow in a new environment and alter their leadership style accordingly.

Mr. Hill (B1) places strategic thinking skills and emotional intelligence at the top of his priority list for successful leadership. He goes on to explain that you have to know when to consult others on decision making and how to empower them to make decisions but also have the courage to lead from the top when necessary. He explains that there is no one size fits all model of leadership.

*"If I look at the principals that have been in my career, you see the seasons of them and you see how schools have different needs at different times and how they appoint different people to do different jobs. It's quite interesting that there's not one model."* – Mr. Hill (B1)

Mrs. Palmer (B2) explains that understanding the institution that you're in is crucial to successful leadership and that you need to align yourself with the ethos and principles of the school. She expands her list of aspects of successful leadership by adding being comfortable with who you are so as not to take things personally, a sense of humour, being imaginative and strategic in your thinking, being visible and well-organized, as well as being consistent with your leadership style. Lastly, she highlights the need to bring in something new to always be on the cutting edge in order to energize the school.

Mr. Lewis (C1) puts personality above all else as the most important feature of successful leadership and agrees that what is needed at different schools varies. He includes integrity and values as well as being a good role model to the staff as integral to successful leadership.

Mrs. Morris (C2) counts transparency, listening to the voices of all stakeholders, charisma and upholding the values of the school as features of successful leadership.

Mr. Johnson (D1) concurs with the importance of strategic thinking and explains that leaders need to be able to see the big picture. He also includes that making decisions from principles and not from situations is important as well as keeping a calm head, clarity of thinking, having a thick skin, being



rugged in your commitment and optimism and knowing what you're good at and where your blind spots are.

Mr. Parker (D2) sees successful leadership as knowing how to play the game and believes that leaders find themselves in these positions due to a mixture of the right person in the right place at the right time. He echoed Mr. Johnson (D1) in saying that you need to find out what your strengths are and know your weaknesses and then surround yourself with people that can help. He also adds leading by example, honesty, a sense of humour, being humble and being decisive to his list of requirements for successful leadership.

These answers place more emphasis on the person in the leadership position than on the practices of the principal. In other words, the principals hold a particular 'theory of leadership' which is at odds with that which is prevalent in much of the school leadership literature: there is a weak alignment between the principals' and the literature's definitions of successful leadership, as the table below shows. The table below shows how the facets of successful leadership as defined by the principals in this study correlate with the literature on successful leadership. If the principal spoke directly or indirectly about one of the facets from the literature review, this is marked with an X.

Having a strong commitment to the vision, mission and goals of the school, shared leadership and holding onto certain values are the only three facets of successful leadership mentioned by the principals. However, as will be discussed more fully below, the fact that the principals did not mention a particular feature of leadership practice did not necessarily mean that this feature was absent in the practices of all leaders at the school.

Table 2: Facets of successful leadership: a comparison between what the literature says and what the principals say

<u>Facets of Successful Leadership According to the Literature</u>	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2	D1	D2
Commitment to the vision, mission & goals				X		X	X	
Shared leadership	X		X			X		
Focus on instruction								
Community of professional learning								
Training & developing staff								
Build relationships & communication								
Hold onto certain values					X	X	X	X

## Professional Practices

The following sections analyse the practices of the eight principals and broader practices within the four schools in relation to the facets of successful leadership, as was set out in the literature review. The data shows that, even though these facets were not explicitly identified by the principals in the interviews as key to their approach, these facets are present in the daily practices of the school leadership as a whole. Each paragraph in this section serves to highlight the presence of each of these facets of successful leadership in the four schools and then shows the differences in how these are carried out in the practices and routines of each school context where relevant.

### A Strong Commitment to the School's Vision, Mission and Goals

The four schools in this study do articulate their school's goals through their vision and mission statements. In the case of three of the schools, St. Stephen's, St. Margaret's and Upton College, it is clear that the school's goals are agreed upon by the different stakeholders and the various school community members buy into the mission and ethos. Hilldale College presents a different picture. Although there is a strong commitment to the vision of the school by way of its distinctive curriculum, there seems to be less coherence in what the goals of the school should be. While Mr. Johnson (D1) mentioned that the aim is to grow enrolment at the school, Mr. Parker (D2) feels that the small size is what 'makes the school'.

### Shared Leadership

All four schools do promote shared leadership through their leadership structure within the school. Exactly how this is structured is determined by each school's context and specific needs. The leadership structure is also dependent on the size of the school. St. Stephen's, St. Margaret's and Upton College are larger schools and therefore have a more hierarchical structure with many tiers of leadership and responsibility. Hilldale College is smaller and has a principal with two deputies, each in charge of the lower and upper school. These three principals have a much larger portfolio of responsibility as the smaller size of the school and therefore smaller number of staff dictates this necessity.

The varied responses across the schools in terms of who has responsibility for making decisions and how decisions are made demonstrates that the mode of distribution of leadership is dependent on the type of decision required and who is involved, as well as taking into account the specific needs of the school. Mr. Lewis (C1) is very clear about empowering his employees to make decisions and reporting back on solutions rather than problems and decisions taken rather than asking if a decision can be made. Mr. Knight (A1) explains that leaders at different levels have authority to make decisions relevant to their area of responsibility.

### A Strong Focus on Instruction

As outlined in the literature review, successful schools have a strong focus on instruction. The eight principals in this study are either the top leader or second in charge and their direct roles on instruction and teacher practices are varied. To varying degrees, the principals at these schools tend to influence this in indirect rather than direct ways.

Mr. Knight (A1) explains that this responsibility is delegated to other school leaders while his role is to oversee it. Mr. Robertson (A2) has a more direct role in ensuring effective performance of teachers by way of coordinating the review process. Mr. Hill (B1) also explains that quality controlling happens more at the level of the Heads of Department, but says that he would like to get more deliberately involved in the classroom. The teachers at St. Margaret's have a high average age and, according to the principal, are therefore very professional and do not require close oversight. Mrs. Palmer (B2) supports this by explaining that the structures that are in place to evaluate teachers are very relaxed as the teachers are very competent and seen as professionals that get on with their jobs. The teachers also feel the pressure to maintain the same high standards to achieve top exam results which, according to Mrs. Palmer (B2), generates teacher-driven best practices in the classroom.

Mr. Lewis (C1) conducts walkabouts at school and feels that he can get a general sense of what is going on, but the focus on instruction generally comes from the departments within the school. As this is the only government school in the study, each teacher has to fill in an annual report as part of their provincial department monitoring. At the same school, Mrs. Morris (C2) visits the maths classrooms once a term as she also has a responsibility for this department.

At Hilldale College, the educational philosophy of their specific curriculum determines how the teachers teach in the classrooms, but Mr. Johnson (D1) states that it is very difficult to change teacher practices and he feels that they revert to the way they were taught when their doors close.

Mrs. Palmer (B2), Mr. Lewis (C1), Mrs. Morris (C2) and Mr. Parker (D2) all teach and are therefore still directly involved in classroom instruction.

Although Mr. Knight (A1) and Mr. Hill (B1) both talked about curriculum development and monitoring happening at the department level, they are referring more to the planning and delivery of effective lessons rather than the planning of the curriculum more broadly. Both these principals explained that they are currently thinking about the curriculum as a whole and investigating other possibilities: for example, looking at international curricula in order to determine the necessity and feasibility of adopting a new curriculum. Although this is curriculum related, it still relates more to strategic thinking and planning than everyday classroom practice. Mr. Hill (B1) is really considering when it's best to make a major curriculum change. He is looking into the future and echoes the words of his colleague, Mrs. Palmer (B2), who talked about being on the cutting edge of practice and energising the school with something new.

In terms of supporting the teachers to be the best educators they can be, the principals at all four schools highlight creating an enabling environment, ensuring that appropriate resources are available, providing for staff development and training, promoting discussion around teaching and learning and putting supervision, evaluation and observation structures in place.

The principals are very happy with their school's exit exam results. St. Stephen's, St. Margaret's and Upton College all take part in South Africa's National Senior Certificate (NSC) and achieve top ten provincial results. As an international school, Hilldale College participates in a different exit examination programme. Both principals at this school are generally happy with their results, but explain that with such small class sizes, it only takes a few students performing below the expected level to make the results look worse than they are; however, all students passed the grade twelve examinations in 2012.

## Values

The values that the principals talked about in terms of running the school very much align with the values learnt from their childhood experiences, as discussed earlier. Again, honesty and respect featured most often with trust, responsibility, tolerance, balance, hard work, kindness, loyalty and integrity all present. This would suggest that the leadership habitus of the principals are closely aligned with the institutional habitus of their schools.

## Strong Relationships and Effective Communication

All the principals mentioned the importance of building relationships and maintaining good communication at school. The most common way of promoting strong relationships at school that the principals mentioned is by enabling the environment to allow this to take place. All of the schools have social functions in order to allow staff to interact socially and build relationships. Although the degree to which each school focuses on this varies, they all do look for ways to promote relationship building. Mr. Lewis (C1) explains that he learnt from a previous principal that your staff is critical, so first and foremost it is about who you hire and then you need to focus on treating them correctly. It is interesting that the principals at St. Stephen's, St. Margaret's and Upton College, which are more traditionally South African and have long histories, focus more on staff functions in order to promote relationships. With Hilldale College being an international school, teachers and staff come from various backgrounds and Mr. Parker (D2) therefore felt it was important to explain that in order to build strong positive relationships, the staff drew up a list of essential agreements. This provides the staff with a framework of norms within which to operate and collaborate.

Communication in each school is again very varied and based more on contextual needs and the operation of the school. The best and most effective forms of communication are always under review by the principals and their teams. Sometimes the communication tools are already in place and continued by the current principals and in other cases, the principals are adopting methods of communication that they have learned during their earlier careers. Communication takes place in various meeting formats, whether weekly, daily, monthly or at the start of each term and in various teams – by department, grade level, leadership team, senior leadership team, school council and

school board. Communication also takes place via email and newsletters. The context, culture and history of the school define the communication tools and procedures.

### A Community of Professional Learning

This aspect of the effective running of schools is deeply embedded in the daily practices of each of the four schools in this study. The principals interviewed for this study are not all instructional leaders in that this responsibility is in some cases delegated to other leaders in the school. Again, each school ensures that the teachers engage in a community of professional learning in a diverse range of activities designed to enhance the focus on instruction. At St. Stephen's, there is a staff development committee which oversees professional growth, while St. Margaret's has an education committee that takes on this responsibility. Upton College staff take part in five hour long seminars once a term and Hilldale College teachers are required to take online courses in order to teach their curriculum. While these stand out in the principals' thoughts as the main ways that their teachers engage in a community of professional learning, the data shows that there are many other ways that this manifests in their daily practices. According to the responses in the interviews, collaborative teams in various forms meet in each of the schools in order to plan their teaching, exchange ideas, discuss subject related issues and develop professionally. Again, the specific context and needs of the school define the ways in which teachers engage professionally.

### Focus on Training and Developing Staff

All four schools see the training and developing of their staff as paramount to the success of the school and its students. According to the principals during the interviews, the teachers take part in professional development through staff meetings, professional growth seminars, liaisons with a teaching and learning consultant, department training and online training. Mr. Knight (A1) explains that he ensures the funds and resources are available for this through appropriate budgeting and the organization of the school calendar. Due to the different job specifications of each principal, their links with professional development vary. Some of the principals have similar roles to that of Mr. Knight (A1) and others have a closer link in terms of running meetings and staff development days, but all maintain a strong focus on training and developing the staff in their schools.

## Conclusion

As the data shows, each of the facets of successful leadership as defined by the literature is evident in each of the four schools, but it is often not the principal leading the way. The culture, structure and history of the school carry a lot of these facets of leadership practice in the daily momentum of operation. They are ingrained in the institutional habitus of the school as opposed to the personal leadership habitus of the principals. The leadership is distributed in a way that allows other leaders in the school to manage these practices.

It is also evident that the centrality of these facets of leadership is tacitly, rather than explicitly, understood by the principals. Their own more conscious 'theories of leadership' place a stronger emphasis on their own personal characteristics than on these facets.

## Chapter 6: Conclusions of the Study

These case studies aimed to describe and compare how eight school principals forged their pathways to high status positions widely regarded as being successful, how they have engaged with the field of education along the way and how their current practices compare across their elite but different school contexts.

The conclusions are presented in two sections:

Who: Who are the leaders at these four schools?

How: How do these principals lead in their specific contexts?

### WHO

This section reviews how these principals compare and differ in terms of their habitus and economic, symbolic, social and cultural capital.

The analysis suggests compelling similarities amongst these principals. They all attended 'good' schools with extensive facilities which offered many opportunities in academics, sport and cultural activities. They grew up comfortably, but were by no means rich. Gaining access to the schools that they did marked a big achievement in their lives and they internalised this ethos and environment as part of their habitus. There is a strong alignment between the family habitus of these individuals and the institutional habitus of the schools they attended and currently lead. This match contributed to their career trajectories into elite school careers.

When drawing links between the career trajectories of these eight principals and the qualifications of their parents, the idea of aspirant mobility on the part of the principals emerges. Seeking careers as teachers, they all graduated from university and hold tertiary qualifications. From an academic perspective, all but one of these principals have a higher status compared to that of their parents and this enabled them to access the professional world of teaching.



These principals looked up to their teachers, some of whom served as role models for them while they were growing up. For them, the desire to teach could be attributed in part to an aspiration towards social mobility. Gaining access to these schools and prospering within them set them apart from their parents and gave them the ability to reach a higher level of social class. For the most part, their parents weren't in careers that invited high levels of status, prestige or high financial return.

School experiences strongly contribute to the habitus and capital of each principal. These principals took part in school activities and, with one exception, held leadership positions. They were successful in their school environments and contributed to the ethos of their schools in a strong and positive way. This highlights their conformist natures. There were almost no instances in the interviews where the principals challenged the status quo, instead they were socially conservative and compliant in that they accepted authority and embodied the ethos of their schooling.

The principals uphold a similar value set where hard work, doing the right thing and service to others are part of their habitus, which may have contributed to their determination to become a teacher and a school leader. Deciding on a career often creates a difficult choice between high financial return and an ideological idea of saving the world. Teaching falls into the latter category. This choice of career stems from an ideology of doing the right thing, contributing to society and serving others.

Overall, the education backgrounds of the principals create a picture of a certain type of experience: a pattern of success. These principals enjoyed school for the most part and participated in their schools' offerings. They conformed to the values of education and the requirements of the school environment. They looked up to their teachers and came from families that valued education. Their values, parents' qualifications and careers, schooling experiences and positive views of their teachers all formed layers within their habitus', helping to construct their identities and in turn contributing to them reproducing the environment in which they excelled and enjoyed. They were successful at school and moved on to contribute to the continuation of that environment.

These principals brought various forms of capital into their careers, such as familiarity with the type of schools they currently lead based on having attended, and held student leadership positions in, schools that were, to a degree, similar. They internalized the ethos of their own schools and this helped them

to feel confident in seeking these positions. Personal connections helped them gain access to their jobs. Previous leadership positions in good or elite schools provided them with a certain level of status before arriving at their current schools. These principals have worked hard and been willing to move around to gain increasing levels of prestige: with the exception of two principals, this disposition towards perseverance and hard work had been modelled for them by their fathers.

The lack of explicit leadership training amongst these apparently successful principals of high-achieving, high-prestige schools raises questions in relation to the literature calling for more formal leadership training (Bush, 2012, Mentz et al, 2010). These principals do however, draw tacitly on past models of leadership and other leadership roles to guide their current practices, which concurs with another view in the literature that leadership training is a broad concept encompassing many experiences over a period of time (Bush 2012:664). Their available capital has afforded them a “crucible of experience” (Clarke & Wildy 2010:15) from which to draw knowledge and guidance.

These principals are contributing to maintaining the world in which they felt so at home and therefore reproducing the environment in which they prospered in order to ensure a continuation of this world for others. They are committed to the institution of schooling and want to remain a part of this world. In Bourdieu’s terms, “capital finds its way to capital” (Bourdieu, 1998:21) in the process of social reproduction.

## HOW

This section reviews how these principals compare and differ in terms of their interplay with the field of education and the strategies that constitute their practice.

The previous section highlighted the compelling similarities between the experiences, values and backgrounds of the principals in this study. These leaders are similar in habitus and similar in initial capital. The differences among them emerge from their positions in the field and their approaches to leadership within their contexts. Although their schools’ practices align with the literature on what

successful principals do, the principals own practices do not necessarily align with what was set out in the literature and they lead differently in ways that reflect the specific nature of each school.

When comparing the facets of successful leadership identified in the literature review with the leadership practices within the schools in this study, it is clear that there is strong alignment between the two. These practices are happening at these schools, but the context of the school determines how they are enacted. In Bourdieuan terms, it is within the interplay with the field where the differences in practice emerge. A noticeable difference between these principals is their type of leadership. Although both the principals and deputy principals in each school are strategic leaders and have responsibility for mapping out their schools' futures, including long term curriculum development, there is a clear distinction between the type of leadership role of the principal and the leadership role of the deputy principal. No one principal in this study is confined to one form of leadership, but principal tends to be more of a strategic leader who enables the environment in which teaching and learning can be most effective. The deputy principals take on more of an instructional leader role while also contributing to strategic leadership. The combination of focus on strategy and instruction affords the school a higher chance to achieve top results while consistently adhering to a strong vision.

There are also other leaders within the schools apart from the principals and their deputies that manage some of these facets of successful leadership. Their leadership is however, distributed according to their particular school's needs in order to manage different aspects of running a school, concurring with the literature on the importance of distributed leadership (Dempster, 2009, Hayes et al, 2006). The deputy principals in these schools play a part in overseeing the curriculum, maintaining a strong focus on instruction, ensuring best classroom practices and staff development. While the principals are not completely divorced from these aspects of successful leadership, their strategic roles are more defined by creating the environment which enables these practices to occur. This includes ensuring there are available finances, personnel and other resources available to meet the needs of the school to function at a competitive level.

Although the schools all have the facets of successful leadership ingrained in their daily structures, these facets are adapted according to the specific needs and school context. Leadership practice is therefore heavily dependent on the context and needs of the school.

The leaders build on their past professional experiences and knowledge and adapt it to their current context. Engaging with the field of education through networking with colleagues in other schools, joining educational organisations, liaising with the school community members and drawing on the capital they carry with them enables the leaders to understand the specific context and needs of their schools and to take on the challenges that are required to maintain or further project their growth and improvement.

All but one of the principals in this study do not have substantive formal leadership training. They have acquired the skills along the way and tacitly based practice on past models and experience, which is learning by doing rather than by theory. In the case of these eight principals, this has enabled them to lead in ways that are perceived, within the schools and school communities, to be effective. Using their knowledge gained from past experiences and more specifically, previous leadership roles, they are seen as having the necessary skills to inform their current practices and adapt them accordingly, understanding the influence of context on how they enact practices. This research therefore concurs with the view that the way in which the school leader navigates the daily demands of their school depends on the specific context and needs of the school (Ngcobo & Tikly, 2010:223, Potter et al, 2002:243).

While the facets of successful leadership drawn from the literature, such as a focus on instruction, professional development and the promotion of ongoing learning and collaboration between teachers are evident in the daily practices of these principals and their schools, the principals do not explicitly identify these facets as being central to their approach to leadership, with the exception of the idea of having a strong commitment to the school's vision, mission and goals, promoting shared leadership and holding strong to certain values.

The lack of alignment between what the principals define as successful leadership and what the literature outlines as successful leadership may be accounted for in two ways. Firstly, the cultural capital which informs the leadership practices of these principals is so tacit that they are not consciously aware of the ways in which they are enacting or contributing to maintaining these practices.

Secondly, these practices are embedded in the culture and history of these elite schools in an ongoing, taken for granted way. Leadership *is* distributed, there *is* a strong focus on instruction, teachers *do* collaborate, ongoing training and development of staff *is* high on their priority list, building relationships and striving for effective communication *is* ingrained in their daily structures and the values of the leaders *are* closely aligned with the ethos of their schools. But the principals themselves are not necessarily leading each of these aspects directly. Their activities are focused instead on strategic leadership. They are not responsible for the daily focus on instruction. These schools are therefore, in part, running on some kind of momentum based on their history, their success, their niche curriculum or access to top financial and human resources. And this keeps these schools at the top of the curve.

Are these principals then figure heads? No, in fact they are the exact opposite. These findings are not meant to diminish the roles of these leaders, but rather actually to highlight the demands of leadership in these schools. Their schools and their careers are at the top of their game and therefore they have further to fall. These principals must spend more time thinking strategically and determine what's next, how they can remain at the top and be seen to be at the cutting edge of practice. Innovation is key. This is unforged territory. These elite schools have to create their own map to ensure that their schools remain at the top of the curve.

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## Appendix

### **Interview Schedule**

#### **Interview Schedule for Successful Principals**

Written questions to be filled in by interviewee

Name (optional):

Title:

Date of interview:

Place of interview:

Age:

Number of years as principal:

Vice/deputy principal:

Head of Department:

Other leadership roles:

#### **Information about the school**

Type of school:

Foundation date:

Number of students:

Number of boys:

Number of girls:

Number of students per grade:

Number of classes per grade:

Number of teachers:

Teacher student ratio:

Destination of graduates (elite school indicator):

School facilities (elite school indicator):

Activities and sports on offer (elite school indicator):

Entrance requirements (elite school indicator):

(Fees: elite school indicator: look up on internet)

Can you give me a brief history of your school?

### **Interview Schedule Categories**

1. **Personal Background**: family background and childhood  
**Main Focus**: How have the internalised events and relationships of the principal's personal background shaped their habitus and led to their current success?
2. **Education**: school, university and other educational experiences  
**Main Focus**: What forms of capital from the principal's education background have contributed to their success? How have the experiences of their education influenced their habitus and their disposition as a leader?
3. **Professional Experience**: work and leadership experience  
**Main Focus**: How has the interplay of the habitus, capital and field determined the career trajectory of each principal?

### **Personal Background**

**Main Focus**: How have the internalised events and relationships of the principal's personal background shaped their habitus and led to their current success?

Which family members did you grow up with in your childhood home?

Do you have any siblings? What is your birth order?

What is your father's highest held qualification?

What is your mother's highest held qualification?

What was your father's occupation growing up?

How did your father view his job? What did you think about your father's work? (Work ethic: good? Learn anything from this work ethic?)

Can you tell me something about your father's relationships? How he interacted with others? At work? Home? Elsewhere? (Any lessons on leadership?)

What was your mother's occupation growing up?

How did your mother view her job? What did you think about your mother's work? (Work ethic: good? Learn anything from this work ethic?)

Can you tell me something about your mother's relationships? How she interacted with others? At work? Home? Elsewhere? (Any lessons on leadership?)

Do you have any particularly strong memories of either of your parents that epitomizes their characters?

Who else (other possibilities: mentor, coach, role model) influenced you in your childhood? (Looking for potential leaders)

Examples: parents, grandparents, other family members, religious leaders, family friends

What was it about this person that influenced you?

What did you want to be when you were a child? A teenager? A university student?

Do you remember any of your family members or people close to you that you particularly admired? What did you admire? Do you have any examples? Do you remember how that felt? (Looking for family members or others that experienced success and therefore provided examples of success – can use this notion of experiencing success as a later prompt)

What values did your family promote? Which ones stand out? How did you feel about these values? Would you promote them to your own children or students? (What lessons were learned? Examples: commitment, try your best, be productive, respect)

Where else did your values or life lessons come from? (Religion, cultural practices?)

Do you remember any heroes from your childhood? What did admire most about these heroes?  
(Fictional or real)

What other activities interested you growing up?

Do you have your own children? What values do you try to teach them? If not, what values do you think you would pass on to your own children if you had them?

## **Education**

Main Focus: What forms of capital from the principal's education background have contributed to their success? How have the experiences of their education influenced their habitus and their disposition as a leader?

What school did you attend? (primary/secondary/tertiary)

Tell me about your school experience? Did you receive any form of recognition at school? (Leadership positions at school or university? Prefect, sports captain, student council, etc.)

Did you like academics?

What were your favourite thing(s) about school? (specific subjects, sport) Least favourite?

Did you have any big dreams about yourself as an adult? (career, accomplishments, assets, relationships, etc.)

Do you have any specific memories of any of your teachers or principals that stand out?

Can you remember any experiences of personal success in your childhood? (Academics, sport, other extra mural activities) Do you remember how that felt?

What academic qualifications do you hold?

Why did you want to become a teacher?

What, if any, training did you have before entering a leadership position?

What, if any, training did you have after starting in a leadership position?

Have you had any practical, hands-on leadership training? (e.g.: job shadowing)

What is the most important lesson you learned from your training?

### **Professional Experience**

Main Focus: How has the interplay of the habitus, capital and field determined the career trajectory of each principal?

#### **Capital**

What route did you follow that led you to your current role?

(previous leadership roles, including years in each position as well as previous jobs and leadership roles in another profession)

How did you become interested in heading a school?

What qualities do you have that made you feel comfortable in going for this role? (cultural)

Do you feel that teaching prepared you for this post? (cultural)

Do you draw on any previous principals' practices in your own principalship? (social)

Did anybody help guide/encourage you into choosing your profession? If so, who? How? (social)

From where do you draw support for your role as principal? (Who do you turn to for help in difficult times?) (social)

What kinds of relationships among staff do you promote at school? Do you feel that you have any particular strengths in interpersonal skills? Are there any areas that you find particularly challenging? (any social activities outside of school, other activities in school) (Promoting a sense of community)

#### **Field**

Why do you think you were selected for this post?

What aspects of the job do you find the most interesting/rewarding? Least interesting/rewarding?

Do you find yourself interacting with principals in other schools?

Do you belong to any principal or school networks or educational organizations?

How is your school accredited?



What is the leadership structure above you? What is your relationship with them? Do they come to the school and interact with you? If so, do you find this helpful?

Can you give me an example of a difficult situation at school? How do you deal with this?

### Strategies

After the principal has mentioned each of the features they think are important for successful leadership, if the following facets of successful leadership from the literature have not been brought up, follow the same line of questioning for each aspect.

### Facets of successful leadership drawn from the literature:

- Have a strong commitment to the school's vision, mission and goals
- Promote shared leadership
- Have a strong focus on instruction
- Hold certain values
- Build strong relationships and communicate effectively
- Engage in a community of professional learning
- Maintain a strong focus on training and developing
- What do you consider to be the most important features of successful school leadership?
- Why do you think this is important?
- Where and when did you start doing this?
- Who or what taught you that this was important?
- What do you consider to be the most important features of successful school leadership? Can you give an example?
- Why do you think this is important?
- Where and when did you start doing this?
- Who or what taught you that this was important?

### Questions based on the Literature Review:

What are the most important goals in the school? To you? To the board? To other school leaders? To the teachers? Do these groups all agree on these goals? How did they originate? (Any agreement or conflict surrounding the goals?)

How are these reviewed?

Are they communicated to the school community? How?

Can you tell me something about the particular ethos of your school?

Promoting shared leadership:

What is the leadership structure at your school?

Who is responsible for making decisions in your school?

Through what process are decisions made?

What decisions need staff consensus before being made?

Who is able to make decisions on your behalf when you are absent?

Strong focus on instruction:

As school principal, what is your role in relation to classroom practices?

How do you support teachers to be the best educators they can be?

What process do you follow to deal with a teacher that does not meet your expectations?

What is your role in relation to curriculum development and monitoring? Do you receive any curriculum support?

Are you happy with your school's matric/exam results?

Hold certain values:

What values do you hold onto for the effective running of the school?

Build strong relationships and communicate effectively?

What role do you play in relation to the way teachers relate to each other or experience the workplace? (Any social activities promoted that enhance professional life/make it an enjoyable place to work? Any promotion of positive relationships at work?)

How do you communicate decisions and other information to the teachers?

Engage in a community of professional learning:

In what ways do you facilitate conversation around teaching and learning?

Maintain a strong focus on training and developing:

How do you support the training and development of your teachers and administrative staff?

Are there internal and/or external opportunities for teacher training?

Do teachers in your school collaborate? In what ways? Is this an important part of teacher practice at your school?

End of interview:

As you know, I've been asking questions that relate to what constitutes successful leadership. Is there anything you feel that my questions haven't captured? Anything further you'd like to add?